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IRISH NEIGHBOURS

IRISH NEIGHBOURS

BY

JANE BARLOW

AUTHOR OF "IRISH IDYLLS," "BOGLAND STUDIES"
"MAUREEN'S FAIRING," ETC.



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TO

J. W. B.

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THE MIGRATION OF MURTAGH GILLIGAN

IRISH NEIGHBOURS

THE MIGRATION OF MURTAGH GILLIGAN

I

IN the chilly grey of the summer dawn Murtagh Gilligan was wakened by something skirling and croaking down his chimney. It was an early-rising jackdaw, which, having with fateful consequences thoroughly roused the reluctant sleeper, flew away out of his story. Murtagh got up at once, and made his way cautiously out of doors, not because he felt any wish to explore his new, hateful surroundings, but merely because it seemed intolerable to lie still and think how far he was from Barnadrum. All the day before he had spent, to his sorrow, in journeying eastward across the width of Ireland. An outside-car at each end, with an interminable train in the space between, had carried him through scenes which he had not the heart to notice, and dusk had blurred everything by the time he neared his destination.

Now as he stood at the little green wooden gate, he looked about him with small curiosity, so firmly was he convinced that in his lost Barnadrum alone could life be worth living. The fact that he had known no other place in his five-and-twenty years did but strengthen this conviction. He could not be said to have chosen a propitious moment for his first survey of pre-judged Portcormac. It was that trying hour before sunrise when in the lack-lustre twilight everything wears a drearily unreal aspect, meaningless somehow, and yet menacing. Murtagh saw a flat stretch of tilled land, with a sprinkling of cottages and trees. Close at hand the fields were large and square, divided by low, straight hedges, and mostly filled with cabbages and turnips. "Faix, but it's the quare, ugly, unnathural-lookin' little dog-hole," he said to himself. "I wisht the devil was sailin' away wid the half of it before ever I set eyes on it."

The country he had quitted is partly spread in wide moorlands, and crumpled partly into peaks and glens, so that its wild spaciousness abounds with small sheltering nooks, one of which had been his own and his forefathers' for the deer knows how long between them all. Certainly the accumulated regrets of many generations seemed to weigh upon Murtagh's spirit as his thoughts turned towards the little house under the hill. With more clearness than meets the bodily eye he

beheld the fleck of white and brown against the grassy steep, dappled with furze and boulders ; it was as if the sweeping slope had receded into a hollow just for the accommodation of the Gilligans' abode. Murtagh, at any rate, felt that he had left the single spot on earth into which he fitted, and to which he belonged by rights. Beyond it the whole world was as unsuitable for a dwelling-place as the lonesome ocean that, not many rods from his door, rounded off everything to the westward with a hazy rim.

And here, by the same token, he descried a few fields off the familiar watery curve, dimly colourless in the pale gloaming, but not to be mistaken, nor yet to be recognized without a gleam of pleasure. Though Murtagh had no great love for the sea as such, he could not in this alien region fail to find something consolatory in the sight of any accustomed object ; and he made for it straightway, down a lane bordered by furrows set thick with their thriving crops. To his mind they had a vile, outlandish appearance. He felt several degrees less dejected when he presently found himself on the strand, where the crude, harsh smell of the turnips yielded place to those ocean-odours by old acquaintance endeared. It was a rough beach, sloping in ill-defined terraces of shingle, strewn with large stones, on one of which he seated himself, and stared out, across the still, floor-like water. Often-times had he sat just so among the wrack-wreathed

boulders on summer evenings at home ; with the difference, it is true, that then he was at home, so thoroughly as to have his house in view very close by if he turned his head. In fact it had been a favourite diversion of his boyhood to watch until the broad disk of the setting sun touched the water's rim, and then scamper up the foot-slope to reach his door before the scarlet fireball had quite gone under. Generally he had easily won that race, run with his elongated shadow sliding on before him, to shoot up against the white wall, and in the dark room he would always find his mother busy about supper at the hearth, red as if with brands plucked from the fading west. He thought of it now, and added the reflection that here was no sun-setting, but a miserable and undesired dawn. The sun, no doubt, would by and by be swinging up over the dismal fields behind him, and weary hours must pass before he could hope for even the poor comfort of seeing yonder horizon flush with the end of an exile's day.

Thinking thus, he chanced to raise his eyes, and there was a small arc of fiery gold low down in the leaden grey haze far out on the utmost verge. As he stared at this half incredulously, it rose and grew, lifting itself up higher, and rounding itself into a full orb, burning raylessly. Beyond question the sun was coming up out of the sea. An unutterable horror rushed over Murtagh at this sight. If it had trundled itself towards him across the

water's face, the portent would have seemed scarcely more startling and astounding. Perhaps, indeed, he had actually learned enough from his school-books to know that such a thing could be explained scientifically ; but this did not alter its bewildering novelty in his own personal experience, or diminish his dismay. "The sun to be risin' itself up wrong-ways out of the say in place of goin' down. Saw you ever the like of that ?" he protested to his lonely self. "Och, but it's the unnatural place altogether. Stoppin' in it is what I won't be for man or mortal. Sure if Herself knew the quareness of it, she wouldn't ax me, sorra bit of her would. And the rest of them may say what they plase. The fine fool I was to be mindin' them, troth was I."

He turned his back abruptly on the misplaced sun, which began to pursue him with quivering ruddy shafts, and before he had traversed the short lane he had firmly made up his mind that he would start for Barnadrum without delay. The promptness of his resolve much favoured the chances of his acting on it, as the lapse of a few days would probably have wrought a melancholy acquiescence in his lot, whence he might have lacked energy to emerge. His first steps would now cost him but little trouble, the end of them was what bothered him, and that it well might do so could be easily understood by any one acquainted with the circumstances in which he had left home.

Ere that came to pass there had been an incredible amount of argument about it and about in the little dwelling huddled below Knocknagee. A large share of the talk had been done by Lizzie, the rather newly married wife of Murtagh's elder brother, Christy. She was one of the Aherns, who had the name of possessing tongues like the clapper of a mill. All through the spring and early summer her theme had constantly been what a pity it was to see a fine young man like Murt wasting his time in such a poor, backward place as Barnadrum, where the most he could do was scarce worth his victuals; and thence she had gradually proceeded to how far better would be his chances if he were working on her cousins' farm in the county Louth, where they wanted another hand, since the last brother went to the States, and where they would a deal liefer employ somebody belonging to respectable people than a stranger, who might turn out a rogue on them for aught they could tell. In this view Lizzie was supported, half-heartedly, by her husband, whom she appraised as "a big, soft gob of good nature," and volubly by all her own kin, who were numerous among the neighbours. But the little old woman who sat in the chimney-corner never added a word to the chorus of exhortation, and Lizzie was not slow to perceive that as long as his mother kept silence, Murtagh would be urged in vain. Lizzie, indeed, seldom was slow about perceiving things into which it behoved her to pry, and she had

sufficient reasons, mere fact being by no means indispensable, when she soon adopted a habit of expatiating much to her mother-in-law on the wonderful fancy that Murt had taken for Andy Loughlin's youngest daughter, Biddy. Old Mrs. Gilligan had occasionally expressed a wish that Murt might find a good wife before she herself got her death with the rheumatism and asthma, which made her health precarious. But a vague and invisible good wife was one thing, and that red-headed girl of ould Andy Loughlin's quite another. Who were the Loughlins, bedad? cock them up—and she never had any liking for that Biddy at all. So Murtagh presently learned, with grief, that his mother had come round to everybody else's opinion about the advisability of his departure.

And the worst of it was that he knew how right they were, in a way. There really was not employment for two men on the shred of a holding, now mostly mountainy land, fit only for sheep, since Lawson the grazier had somehow come by their two best fields on their father's death. Christy could easily get on without him, and he would be far more use away earning and saving up money to buy a bit of stock, than stopping in it, and eating the worth of every hand's turn he did. Besides that he might be able to send home many an odd trifle that Herself was at a loss for in the winter. He had said something of this to Lizzie, when he was beginning to face the dreadful enterprise, where-

upon she had drawn such a picture of the comfort in which his mother would abide during his absence, and the years which he would thus add to her life, that it had gone far towards evicting him. Moreover, Lizzie in a jocular, good-humoured way threw out hints about the charms of Biddy Loughlin, which no doubt made it hard for him to think of leaving ; and these again gave him, as the jester intended, a strong shove in the same direction. So he had at length set forth desperately from an excited village, for his long hesitation had been watched with interest by the neighbours. Some of them predicted his speedy return, notwithstanding that the price of three sheep at Ballynaughton fair had been laid out upon his travelling expenses. The consideration of that pecuniary sacrifice weighed less heavily with him than the sense that he was fulfilling those prophecies ; the fore-knowledge of how folk would "rise the laugh on him," while Lizzie would account with intolerable facetiousness for his untimely reappearance. Undoubtedly much wrath and ridicule awaited him at Barnadrum.

Though all this did not now avail to dissolve the purpose which had crystallized so swiftly as he stood by the reddening sea, it did modify his proceeding, for it disposed him to travel slowly. Speed was, it is true, put out of his power by the fact that his sense of honour impelled him to make his hosts, the MacFarlanes, the utmost amends he could, lest they should have been caused any expense or

inconvenience by his change of plans. Murtagh's desire ever was to be what his Gaelic-speaking neighbours called *flahool* in all his dealings, and he handed over his one-pound note to old Peter Mac-Farlane with an air which conveyed the impression that such things grew like leaves on the trees at Barnadrum, and that he only regretted not having happened to bring more of them along with him. But as in truth it represented considerably more than half his cash in hand, the transaction strictly limited his choice of the means by which he would recross Ireland, and quite excluded railways. Still there were, of course, possibilities of loitering on foot. Then, as at the first sizable town into which he tramped he provided himself with a pound of the dearest tea for his mother, the number of his shillings was reduced very seriously, considering the ways and days that lay before him. This seemed to prescribe haste, and he did make the first stages of his journey in immensely long forced marches, though less from dread of failing supplies than from a wish to get as quickly as might be out of that doleful region, with its strange-spoken people, and deplorable lack of bog-lands, or anything you could give the name of a hill.

II

By the time that Murtagh came once more among reassuring turf-stacks his brown, Spanish-looking visage had grown pinched and peaked, from, in a measure, much exercise and scanty fare, but chiefly from the workings of an anxious mind. Often it kept him waking distressfully as he passed the night in the shelter of some dyke or rick, where he would have been well enough content, had not concern about the future driven away his dreams. For while the smell of the turf-smoke on the air, and the gradually more home-like aspect of the country-side, seemed to whet the edge of his longing for Barnadrum, they also made him forecast more vividly the details of his reception there. He saw himself walking up the steep boreen, which runs between high furzy banks into a little settlement of cabins called the Town. He heard somebody shout, "Here's Murt Gilligan comin' along," and knew that every half-door in view would forthwith frame an amazed beholder of his approach, and that he would have to answer as best he might the awkward questions, and meet with what spirit he could muster the more or less friendly sallies of the neighbours.

That would be disagreeable enough, but graver far were the troubles he foreboded at home, where amazement and amusement would anon give place to wrath, not unreasonable, considering "the sum

of money he was after as good as throwing behind the fire on them"—thus Lizzie would word it, and Christy would back her up with inarticulate sounds of contempt. About his mother's reception of him he was less clear. Glad to see him he very well knew that she would be ; yet he had reason to apprehend an underlying regret in her gladness. Keen was his recollection of how on his last day at home, when she had wrung his heart by wistful, belated hints that he might yet change his mind, he had tried to cheer themselves up with extravagant views of the splendid things which would be coming for her by parcel post to Clonbeg office while he was away, and the others which he would return bearing one of these days. It was impossible for him to say how much she might be counting upon those promises, the fulfilment of which had now dwindled into a packet of tea. And even this was doomed to disaster by his foolish precipitancy in burdening himself with it at such an early stage of his journey.

One morning as he was coming near a small village, where he intended to get his breakfast, he passed an old country-woman in a large black cloak with a wide-frilled white cap under the hood, and two or three brilliant little fringed shawls above it. A moment afterwards she laid a hand on his arm. " You're sowin' your tay, good lad," she said, and, sure enough, all along the path he had come by lay a thin, black line of his precious parched leaves.

A rent in the blue paper bag had been made by a sharp stone on which he had unwarily laid down his bundle overnight, in the shed a mile away ; and an unlucky hole in the red cotton covering had let the tea trickle through so steadily that only a few good-for-nothing grains were left. His home-coming was bereft of its one poor triumph.

All these vexations disposed Murtagh to dawdle on his road as long as he could supply his wants, which were few and compressible. He was following the hay-harvest westward to districts whither it came later and later. Every now and then he stopped to do a day's mowing or rick-building, whereby he earned what paid his way on a further tramp. By the time he was almost on the borders of his own country, however, where he began to recognize objects familiar not only in kind but as individuals, meadows had grown rare, and the demand for labourers proportionately small. Nevertheless as he plodded, lag-foot, up and down hill, with a sound of jibes and reproaches yet unuttered tingling in his ears, he formed a plan the carrying out of which hinged upon the possibility of his finding field-work. He would take up his quarters, he thought, in one of the old ruined shanties away at the back of Knocknagee, with a good long step between him and home, still not so far off but that he might with a little contriving get a glimpse occasionally, unbeknownst, to satisfy him "what way *Herself* was" ; for that particular anxiety now

predominated over all the rest. The shillings remaining to him would procure him potatoes for some weeks, he calculated, while, as the season advanced, he might make short excursions out into the country, and pick up jobs at the reaping and binding. In this manner he would be able to maintain himself apart, yet not completely severed from his family, until the weather waxed "entirely too sevare," when he might openly return, with possibly a bit of money in his pocket, and certainly, after an absence which could be described as "going on for six months," in a position to put a much better face on his conduct than if he had just come ignominiously bundling back before they had well got rid of him.

Up among the grassy breadths and creases of the long hill-range there was solitude as profound as it can have been ere the days of Partholanus. It was not disturbed even by sheep, since the grazier, whose for the time being were the green herbs on a thousand acres, had removed his flocks pending a dispute with his landlord, and the pastures lay derelict. Signs, however, clearly showed that a different state of things had existed there not so very long ago. The ruined cabin wherein Murtagh established himself was one of several that still possessed skeleton rafters, though their thatch had all been snatched away by the winds ; and the sites of others were marked out by walls more or less weathered down, sunken deep in weeds.

Years had not yet washed off or lichenized over the black traces of household fires. But all around, the furrows where potatoes and oats had grown in streaks of rich peaty soil were covered with green sward. Their wave-like swell suggested a tide that had rolled in to submerge the inmates of this deserted hamlet ; a kindlier fate, perhaps, than what had really befallen them, as they had in fact been “put out of it” to make room for sheep.

Thrust forth shelterless as wild birds’ tribe unnumbered,
That no man heed,
Since their master willed the fields their hearthstones cumbered
His flock should feed.

But Murtagh, sitting in a corner, with no other company than a precarious furze-fed flame, did not feel “very lonesome whatever,” because he knew himself to be within about an hour’s quick trot of Lorcan’s Lep, a point on the road across the moor between Barnadrum and Loughmeena, whither folk went to Mass. Lorcan’s Lep is a sharp spur of crag jutting out from a high, steep bank, and overhanging the road. A tangle of thorns, briars, and bracken cover it with a shaggy thicket in which a man might lurk unseen to look down on the passers-by. Amongst these every Sunday morning came the Helys’ car, which for many a year had been wont to pick up old Mrs. Gilligan at Finny’s Cross, whenever she could walk so far. And next day would be Sunday. Consequently Murtagh was looking forward to setting eyes on his mother

before another sun went down—rightly into the sea. That sight would be vastly consoling and encouraging, and would set his heart at rest for a week to come.

Good care he took to be on the spot betimes, and the car did not fail to come by, but it did fail to bring what he desired. For in his mother's seat sat merely his sister-in-law, Lizzie Ahern—cock her up—“looking as if she thought there wasn't her match in three parishes, and she with as ugly an appearance on her as you'd aisy find anywhere, if she did but know it.” Though he had warned himself beforehand that there was only a chance of seeing his mother, and though, had he not hoped for something better, he would have rejoiced at a sight of Lizzie's familiar face, his bitter disappointment at first blinded him to all mitigating circumstances. When, after a while, he began to make the best of it, he admitted that Herself was noways very likely to come out on such a dull, soft sort of day, and that if nobody from home had been on the car he might have thought bad of it, but he well knew Lizzie wouldn't leave his mother if anything much ailed her—most likely she just had a touch of her old enemy the bone-sickness. Moreover, as Corpus Christi Day very luckily fell in the middle of that week, he would not have long to wait for another opportunity of seeing the car go by, it might be with the passenger he wanted.

On the holiday morning, therefore, he came punctually to Lorcan's Lep. It was grand weather, as fine as could be, save for a few brief dashes of rain from the quick-sailing white clouds ; and Murtagh's hopes had risen high. But they were toppled over by a disappointment much more serious than Sunday's had been. It was aggravated, too, very cruelly by a mocking delusion. As the car trotted into view, Murtagh caught sight of the longed-for black cloak, and said to himself with a sigh of joyful relief, “ ‘Tis Herself, glory be to God” ; only to see next moment that the hood, instead of covering the white frilled cap on his mother's head, was drawn over the tall peak of Lizzie's fashionable bonnet, “with a hijjis big clump of pink roses stuck on the top of it.”

Now this spacious heavy cloth cloak was old Mrs. Gilligan's most cherished possession. She had inherited it from her mother, after several generations' wear, and it would descend in due course to her own married daughter. Meanwhile she would as soon have thought of lending anybody the hair off her head ; to do so would seem a sort of breach of trust. As Murtagh was quite aware of her feelings about the heirloom, the sight of Lizzie enveloped in its folds filled him with a dismay which coldly extinguished kindling wrath. Never, he reasoned, while she had health and strength to hinder it, would his mother have allowed Lizzie—one of the Aherns—to go trapes-

ing off to Mass in the O'Carrolls' good hooded cloak, that he knew as well as he knew his own name. And yet if her mother-in-law had been taken very bad, Lizzie wouldn't start off and leave the crathur, he would say that for her. Hence he drew the conclusion that something still worse than any sickness must have happened, setting Lizzie free to go whither she pleased, arrayed in any garment she could lay her hands on. At that inference a billow of despair reared itself up ready to devastate his world, and he could oppose its onset only by the alternative conjecture that Lizzie and Christy, having suddenly become most base, had taken advantage of his absence to put upon his mother. In this case it might well have happened that both cloak and seat on the car had been grabbed against her will, and that she was now fretting and grieving at home, without a soul to take her part. The picture thus conjured up enjoined some prompt action, but his first panic-stricken pause had let the car go beyond the possibility of overtaking it, so that his best course was to make as swiftly as he could for Barnadrum. Thither, then, he started immediately, in a flurry of anger and alarm. He deemed it contrary enough that his run across country, furzy, boggy, heathery, should be checked as he descended to the ford of a little mountain-stream by the call to stop and help old Judy Flynn, who had dropped her stick, and upset her basket at the stepping-stones. The

delay, however, had compensations, for Judy's odds and ends comprised a newspaper packet of oatmeal, which, she told him, had just been given to her by "Herself up at your own place"; and as in answer to inquiries she reported that her benefactress "looked not too bad entirely, barring the rheumatics," Murtagh resumed his trot in a more tranquil mood.

III

Old Mrs. Gilligan declared that she would never be the better of the turn she got when she saw him come pelting round the house-corner, and she sitting at the door; but so to declare was, of course, merely a well-recognized convention, and in no way disguised her radiant joy. Not until its first dazzling flare had faded did any grievances emerge into view. Then it struck Murtagh that his mother had become more bent and shrunken during the weeks of his absence, and that she was wearing a very ragged old apron. Looking round the kitchen, too, he noticed sundry small alterations, which he was sure had not been made with her good will; she would never, for instance, let them hang their boots from the rafters, and now a couple of pairs dangled overhead. His guess that the cloak had been a forced loan came near the truth, for a sudden shower just at starting had caused Lizzie in an access of concern about her flowery bonnet to

snatch up the handiest wrap, ignoring a clamour of shrill remonstrance from its owner, and to hurry off in it, little recking what peril she would thus bring upon a darling scheme.

But Mrs. Gilligan did not dwell long on this outrage. Her mind was evidently preoccupied by graver troubles connected with "That One," as she now called her daughter-in-law. These were apprehensions so serious that she could allude to them only in furtive whispers, amid uneasy glances, and she did not get beyond mysterious generalities such as "There's some folks do be sayin' more than their prayers," until she had drawn him into the little inner room, where her queer box of a bed was niched across a slanting corner. She then spoke more freely. "Ah, Murt, avic, it's annoyed they have me this while back. What they do be conthrivin' in their minds I dunno rightly, but up to some bad job they are, as sure as the smoke's risin' on the hearth."

"Who are?" said Murtagh.

"Ah, sure 'tis That One puts the notions into poor Christy's head; the poor lad 'ud never be thinkin' of the like himself. But the talk they have about quittin' out of it, and gettin' over to the States, and all manner, 'ud make your heart sick. And givin' abuse to the good little bit of land, and your poor father's dacint house, rael outrageous. And never done they are colloquin' wid Joe McSharry."

“What at all have they to say to *him*?” Murtagh said, unpleasantly surprised at the name, which he knew as belonging to one among several go-betweens, who took part in preliminary negotiations about the acquirement of land by their expansive grazier neighbour. Already the Gilligans’ holding had been encroached upon by the enlargement of his borders.

“Troth that’s more than I can be tellin’ you,” Mrs. Gilligan replied dejectedly, “but it’s the great discoorsin’ entirely they do be havin’. ‘Twas only last Sunday evenin’ he was here the best part of an hour, and the three of them sittin’ lookin’ at me as if I had seven heads, till I quit out of the room, and left them to their own *secrees*. Cautious enough they were over it, whatever it was. Just the sound of McSharry’s big coarse voice I could hear, and sorra a word plain out of one of them, except that he would be lookin’ in again the first day he was able—and the back of me hand to him. But heart scalded I am frettin’, Murt alanna, and wonderin’ in me mind what might be happenin’, wid you away out of it, and ne’er a sowl I could spake raison to. And That One able to persuade poor Christy to any villiny she might take a notion to be after; that I well know. Be the same token, the two of them should be home again now directly. The Wogans’ twelve o’clock cock was after crowin’ a while ago down below.”

“I hear somethin’ this minyit,” said Murtagh.

But the steps were not Christy's and Lizzie's. It was Joe McSharry himself who presently walked into the house, without "with your leave or by your leave, as if the whole place belonged to him," commented Mrs. Gilligan's wrathful whisper. Yet when Murtagh seemed to be starting up she added, "Ah, stop where you are!" The recollection of his ridiculously premature return checked him into compliance.

Joe McSharry stumped aimlessly about the room for a minute or two, and then went suddenly to the door. "They're comin'," Mrs. Gilligan whispered again, and in fact the voices of Christy and Lizzie and their visitor rose greeting one another at a diminishing distance.

"Well, Mrs. Gilligan, ma'am, you see I'm here before yous, and after makin' free to step inside."

"Och to be sure, Mr. McSharry, and why wouldn't you? Glad I'll be meself to step in from under the blazin' sun. Grand weather we're gettin', thank God; but you might as well be walkin' wid a sod off the hearth on top of your head. And th'ould cloak's a surprisin' weight."

"Bedad now, McSharry, you were the wise man, that was contint, widout disthroyin' yourself this day thrampin' over the countrry to save your sowl."

"Wasn't I savin' it in shoe leather, so to speake? And yourself very like to be doin' the same, if you

hadn't the wife to take you along, aye faix, and halve the road."

"Halve it the other way round, musha moyah!"

"Fut further I'll not set till I rest me bones a bit," said Lizzie, plumping down on the seat in the little porch ; "sit you down, Mr. McSharry, there does be a cooler breath in it here than widin the house."

Murtagh, meanwhile, had stolen swiftly out of the inner room, and with gestures meant to reassure his mother, had slipped behind the high-backed settle, which occupied its summer position at right angles to the front door. The opportunity of overhearing this conversation seemed to demand seizing.

"I just only looked in for a minyit and a half passin' by," said Joe McSharry ; "I'm due over at Randalstown agin two o'clock. But I want to know if you're satisfied to be disposin' of your interest in this place on Lawson's terms. I'm apt to see him over yonder. He's about goin' back to England next week."

"We are so," said Lizzie promptly, "on the understandin' that there's no delayin' in the matter. It's the price paid down, and ourselves able to be quittin' very directly, that 'ud suit us."

"And Lawson, too, belike," said McSharry, "so we're all suited."

Then both he and Lizzie looked towards Christy ; but Christy held down his head, and kept silence.

“What does be botherin’ me,” he said at last, without raising his eyes, “is Herself within there.”

“Why, has she anythin’ to say to it?” said McSharry. “I understood not.”

“Sorra a bit has she,” said Lizzie.

“Tis what’s to become of her,” said Christy. “Out of Barnadrum she won’t stir, that’s sartin.”

“Wasn’t I tellin’ you,” said Lizzie, “times and agin that the little house back of Nicholas Byrne’s is lyin’ empty since ould Peggy Hanlon died in it? His riverence says they let her have it for nothin’ be raison of the roof bein’ scarce worth darnin’; and what was good enough for one ould woman might do for another. She could take her own bed wid her, and maybe a few sticks of the furniture. He says she’d have a right to be gettin’ relief, more betoken——”

“Is it me mother to be goin’ on the rates?” Christy interrupted, starting up furiously. “I’d sooner see the pack of yous swimmin’ like flies in the lake of destruiction, let me tell you.”

“What talk was there of any such thing, man alive?” said Lizzie, wheeling away from her own indiscretion. “Sure we can give her plinty to get along wid out of the thrifle we’ll have in hand, and lashins more once we’re settled in New York. I only passed the remark supposin’ be any odd chance she might want a thrifle between our goin’ and Murt comin’ home to her. . . . It is risin’

objections you'd be, you omadhawn, and delayin' till the young chap lands in on to the top of us and ruinates everything ?" she added in a crushing aside to Christy.

Joe McSharry pricked up his ears. "Is your brother Murt apt to be makin' any bones about it ?" he inquired. "I thought that was all right."

"It's as right as raison," Lizzie averred. "Sure what at all could poor Murt do to annoy anybody, if he come back, and found us quit, and the roof whipped off, the way Lawson would, if he'd be said by me, as soon as we're out of it. There isn't a quieter boy in the Kingdom of Connaught than poor Murt, or a bigger fool, unless maybe Himself here. Besides, truth to say, it's my belief there's little or no likelihood of him to be showin' his face in this place agin. He'd scarce find his way if he thried ; he hasn't that much wit. Stoppin' where he is he'll be, you may depind."

"Sure then we'll manage it aisy," said Joe McSharry, "so long as he isn't givin' any throuble——"

"Divil a bit will I," said Murt, suddenly thrusting his head through the kitchen doorway, "except throublin' you to be off out o' this, and lave interferin' wid other people's property." He put his hands on the back of the settle, and vaulted over it, alighting with a prance in front of the astonished three.

"May the saints have me sowl, but it's Himself," said Christy ; "glory be to God, Murt, it's glad I

am to set eyes on you this day." Christy spoke quite sincerely, for his spirit was indeed sorely vexed by the plot into which he had been drawn, lacking the backbone to resist it unsupported.

In the manner of Murtagh's abrupt entrance Joe McSharry had a sufficient pretext for laughing loud and long, and he did so heartily enough, caring in fact very little one way or the other about a matter from which in no case could any large gains accrue.

The only member of the party seriously disconcerted by Murtagh's reappearance was his sister-in-law, about whose ears a fabric long and craftily elaborated had been shattered into ruin. She, nevertheless, exclaimed, with really admirable presence of mind, that "Poor Mrs. Gilligan would be frightened out of her sivin sinses, the crathur, if Murt come in on her suddint"; and she hurried off the disastrous scene, ostensibly for the purpose of breaking the news gently to her mother-in-law. Already her active brain was busy with the possibilities of some other plan for emigrating from Barnadrum, with less spoil, no doubt, yet not altogether empty-handed.

That evening Murtagh meditatively watched the sun descend into the sea. He had a presentiment that his mother and himself would soon be left to keep house alone, a prospect which he viewed with a light and a heavy heart. His frustration, only just in time, of that domestic conspiracy, while it increased his self-reliance, had sadly shaken his

trust in almost everybody else. Three weeks' sojourn in strange lands had, in spite of himself, relaxed his rigid orthodoxy on a point or two. The rushy corner of their field might, he thought, be drained after a fashion which he had observed on a farm "away down beyant," and which, even to his prejudiced eyes, had seemingly "some sinse and raison in it." As for his neighbours' opinion, that had lost several degrees of importance. "They may be talkin'," he reflected, "and talkin' after that agin. But sure what I do be thinkin' in me own mind about me own business is more consequence to meself than all the talk they have among the whole of them." A view of the situation which contained so many fruitful germs that it may have been well worth Murtagh's while to travel for it.

A REBEL'S BREAKFAST

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EARLY as the midsummer morning light comes glimmering back to Letterglas, Mrs. McEvoy was still earlier astir. She had broken up with a thick stick the smouldering sods on her kitchen hearth, and had kindled a strong flame in the place of their pink and white embers and ashes, before the robin-breast of dawn ruffling through the east streaked it with a dim glow of red, shading off into faint bluish greys. The task to which she had risen so betimes was one that interested her deeply, and she set about it with a heart and a half, as she would have said herself. Having made up her fire, she first polished the round black griddle, and then scooped a bowlful of creamy-white flour out of the meal-chest that occupied one of the many recesses in this wide-floored, low-ceiled room, the whole lower story of her little farm-house. From another corner she fetched a delft jug of thick sour milk and a plate of yellow butter, which so far completed her preparations for mixing and kneading her griddle-bread, that she had only to push up the shortish sleeves of her light-blue linen jacket, and spread out the folds of the unbleached holland apron that protected her crimson

homespun skirt. For coolness she had put off her headgear: the broad-frilled white cap and little grey woollen shawl lay on the window-seat, obscuring several of the few small, deep-sunken panes.

Mrs. McEvoy still had a bloom vivid and delicate like the flush of a pink poppy, but her soft face was graven all over with very fine lines, the work of a troublous half-century; her abundant black hair showed a silvery powdering, and her dark eyes looked sad whenever her thoughts strayed away from the matter immediately in hand. It was entirely engrossing her, however, when a heavy step and stick began to sound overhead, and on the ladder-like stairs that slanted so steeply out of the dark in one of the kitchen's corners. On hearing this, Mrs. McEvoy's countenance fell, and she said to herself, "It's twenty pities the crathur to be waked up. But sure if a weeny scutty-wran let a chirp anywhere's widin a perch of her, out of her sleep she'd be in a flash." She watched with the anxious expression of one who dares not offer assistance the halting descent on a crutch of a tall lame woman, gaunter and greyer, but otherwise resembling herself.

"What ailed you, Brigid, to not be stoppin' quiet in your bed?" said Mrs. McEvoy to her sister, "and me steppin' the aisiest I could in me stockin' feet the way I wouldn't be disturbin' you."

"Sure all the stockin' feet in the parish wouldn't

keep a body sleepin' if she had to be wakin'," said Brigid Coyle, "and after that it's more quiet you'll get 'most anywhere else than lyin' there."

"Well, sit you down, anyway, and don't be standin' about," said Mrs. McEvoy. "Too long the day'll be for you, if you take it by the end."

"That's his bit of cake," Brigid said, pausing at the table where her sister was now rolling the dough into a smooth, flat round, "and nobody's to put a hand to it, I should suppose, only yourself."

"Ah then, Biddy, could you contrive e'er a sort of a linin' to put in the inside of th'ould covered basket?" Mrs. McEvoy said after a moment's struggle. She spoke as if half ashamed of making a mean offer. "There do be a couple of holes in the bottom of it, and I was thinkin' to plait up some manner of little mat to slip in it out of the few rushes lyin' there under the clock. I brought them in last night the way I could be doin' it meself while the cakes was brownin'; but belike I had a right to be mindin' them all the time."

"I'll do that much at any rate," said Brigid, going over to the small sheaf of rushes.

Presently Mrs. McEvoy, having fetched some more flour from the chest, remarked as she crossed the room, "I see them thieves of rats are after makin' offers at it again. There's the marks of their teeth on the wood."

"Givin' a trial you'll have to be to the poison-stuff your husband got before he went to the

North," said Brigid. "I mind Michael Larissy sayin' he'd seen them get their death wid the laist little grain of it in a couple of minyits."

"True for you," said Mrs. McEvoy, "'twas the packet of white powder he brought home one day, God be good to him. But where it might be now I couldn't say, for the throuble put it out of me head ever since."

"Up on the high shelf in the corner-press it is, behind the chest," said Brigid ; "I clapped it in there meself, to not have it lyin' about, for be all accounts what's in it wouldn't be long doin' destruc-
tion on every livin' mortal in the place, let alone them rogues of rats."

"Maybe 'tis the best we can do wid them after all," Mrs. McEvoy said rather dejectedly. "I'd liefer try it than the live trap ; for the last one we caught that way I remember seein', and the boys about carryin' it out into the haggard ; and indeed now the crathur had a very grieved look on it, sittin' in the wires, goodness may pity it. I do be thinkin' bad of it yet of an odd while."

"Yourself's the quare woman, Molly," said Brigid, "as if there wasn't plenty to be thinkin' bad of widout considherin' a terrier worryin' an ould rat."

"Troth is there plinty," said Mrs. McEvoy. "But I dunno what way diff'rent things do come through-other into me mind, and no hind'rin' them, any more than I could be tellin' was it crows

or jackdaws were apt to come flyin' over the house."

"I wisht to God," said Brigid, as she sat twisting the green rushes, 'that I had the settin' of all the hounds of hell on some vermin I could name. That's all I can say."

Silence fell upon the two women for a while. Mrs. McEvoy's countenance was clouded at first, but it cleared again as she went on with her cookery. The deft rolling and shaping, and dividing into three-cornered cakes, was work after her own heart, even if she had not been making them for the behoof of her son Christy, "the kindest little gossoon in the width of Ireland, and the best to his ould mother since the day he was born." At the present time, it is true, the circumstances of this praiseworthy person were such as might well have diminished the satisfaction with which she thought about him, seeing that he was a hunted outlaw, hiding for dear life in the caves of the earth, and certain to obtain nothing better than the shortest shrift if he fell into the hands of his questing foes. But Molly McEvoy's was, despite much experience, a hopeful mind, and as long as she could be doing a hand's turn for anybody she seldom despaired of his fortunes. It came natural to her to imagine Fate not less kindly purposed than herself. Sometimes, indeed, the only services she could render had been plainly and piteously futile, and the event had proved them so with remorseless disregard of

her hopes. On this occasion, however, there were really some grounds for thinking that Christy was no longer threatened by any very immediate peril.

Trustworthy tidings had reached the McEvoy's little farm that the military, who had lately been scouring the countryside for rebels, were moving away southward. Whereupon these two remaining relatives of the Christy McEvoy who was lying hidden yonder in the Crooked Hole on the hillside, up below Windy Gap, felt as if a hundredweight had been lifted off their hearts. Not that his prospects were anything but most precarious. Still the loosened grip of imminent peril was a vast relief. Even Christy's mother was able to reflect with some pleasure as well as pride on the exploit, that daring raid and rescue, which had given the lad renown among his friends, and made his enemies the more eager to hunt him down. As she buttered the griddle, she thought that he might possibly venture back to the house for a day or so before he set off to join his father in the North, and she said something of this hope to Brigid, who gainsaid it emphatically. "Twould be no thing for him to attempt at all. For the life of you don't go put it into his head to be trustin' them that's maybe not over honest—maybe not. 'Tis the good job Tim Lanish—bad luck to him—to be away these last few days ; but you couldn't tell now when he might come back. And there's others not much better."

" 'Twould do me heart good to see the child sittin' warm be the fire again," Mrs. McEvoy said.

" Contint you had a right to be wid seein' him the way you will," said Brigid, " and for the matter of the fire, he'll do well enough where he is this weather ; 'twould be another thing if he was starvin' wid the cold in winter. But apt to be hungry he is."

" These'll be ready now very prisently," said Mrs. McEvoy, turning her cakes. " Glory be to God, they're as grand as ever I baked, and have a fine smell off of them entirely." The hot griddle was quickly crisping their crusts to a delicate brown, and between them the dough swelled with a flaky richness. Their odour filled the air invitingly. " I'm after puttin' a very good lump of butter in them," Mrs. McEvoy said complacently. " Like the slim-cakes they are that me poor mother did be makin' us in the ould days. And a good few of them there are too ; 'tis nigh the last of the flour. But I'll have room in the basket for a jug of the thick milk. Christy does be drinkin' that ever, if he can get it, like a young calf."

" I'd come along wid you, and help you wid carryin' them, and git a sight of him meself," said Brigid, " but sure I'd be only delayin' you, streeelin' after you like an ould spancelled goat. I'll fetch the brown jug."

They were filling it out of the heavy earthenware pan, when Brigid started violently and began to listen.

“What is it at all ?” said Mrs. McEvoy.

“What is it yourself ?” said her sister.

“Nothin’ in the world,” Mrs. McEvoy declared stoutly, “except only the clock tickin’.”

Brigid made her way over to it and stopped the pendulum, but the ticking sound continued. Then she threw open the front house-door, and the ticking changed forthwith into the distant clatter of many horses’ hoofs.

They were on the Camolin high road, which runs within a rather long third of a mile of the McEvoy’s farm, and they were coming from the direction of Dawsonstown. The point where this road draws nearest to the farm is at Foyle’s Cross, whence a deep-banked boreen or cart-track winds up to the house and ends there. Would the horses turn into it ? As the two women stood looking out, they could see the course of the high road marked by a line of trees and tall hedges, but everything moving on it was screened from view ; their hearing grew for the nonce their sole appreciable sense. By this time the summer sun had risen, and reached them with trembling honey-coloured rays, struck far across the land from where, over a blink of sea, brooded great wing-like clouds, with silver pools burning among them. But the most marvellous of portents shining out of the skies would at that moment have been lost upon Molly McEvoy and Brigid Coyle as they listened —listened.

Although the horses were trotting briskly enough, it seemed a very long while before the trampling of them sounded as if from near the fateful junction of the Cross. Then for another breathless space the listeners believed that their worst fears were to be realized, as the hoofs appeared to halt and stamp about, as if some slight confusion were caused by turning the troop out of the wide road into the narrow lane. This, however, proved a false alarm, for by and by it became clear, even to the surmises of terror, that instead of waxing heart-sickeningly louder and nearer, the sounds were steadily receding, keeping on along the highway. When it was beyond all manner of doubt that the turn had been safely passed, each sister spoke in the bliss of relief from a scare which still left their faces drawn and large-eyed.

Mrs. McEvoy said, "Glory be to the great God. 'Tis south the divils are goin' sure enough. May He save and defend the misfortunate people they'll be comin' among. But och, woman dear, I thought he was destroyed."

"And the black sorrow be their bed wherever they go," said Bridgid Coyle. "Aye troth, troopin' off they are this time, and trottin' in a hurry. But if the poor dacint brute bastes had the wit to know what at all they were carryin', it's lyin' down under them on the road they'd be, and rowlin' the bones of the miscreants into bruss."

"Och to goodness! I wouldn't have aught to be

delayin' them in this country. Let them get the furthest they can from Christy before ever they begin rowlin'," said Christy's one-idea'd mother. "'Tis a lucky thing I was just after liftin' the little cakes off of the fire when we got that quare turn ; or they'd be apt to get spoilt on us burnin' hard, and we not mindin' them. Sure now the sooner I'm takin' them to him the better. Starvin' he'll be since yesterday mornin'."

They went back into the kitchen, where a spreading fan of golden light had now unfurled itself through the dim little window. All the room glowed with it, save a few shadowy corners. The odour of the hot cakes was wafted about, and Mrs. McEvoy looked happily at the crisp pile that gleamed fair and comely on the table.

"I'll be off the soonest I can," she said.

"You'll do right," said her sister.

To finish filling the milk-jug was their first care, and they had some difficulty in devising a cover for it, to keep its contents from splashing out and spoiling the cakes. At last they succeeded in tying down over it a huge leaf of coltsfoot, which Mrs. McEvoy fetched from the weedy yard. Then, leaving Brigid to pack the basket, she quickly put on her thick-soled shoes, and her cap and headshawl, which, despite the warmth, she surmounted with a hooded cloak of heavy dark-blue cloth, thus completing her equipment for the expedition. Out at the back door she would go, straight into the

wood, which clothed the steep ridge behind their house, and down the footpath descending a ravine into the glen at the further side. There this path ran along by a swift, brown stream, which she would have to cross on stepping-stones, that she might scramble up the opposite wall of the glen. Craggy and shagged with bushes, it had in it, low under a furze-hung rock, one crevice, which the unenlightened visitor might pass unnoticed a thousand times. But it was in reality the barely possible entrance to a den-like cave, where Christy McEvoy had been hidden since his return home a couple of days ago, travelling built up in a cartload of timber; and there his mother looked forward to meeting him at the end of her walk. The sight of him crawling out in answer to her signal was a vivid mind's-eye picture, that gave her movements a joyful hurry.

As she went to take up the basket, she became aware that Brigid was watching her with a wistful look, and she felt a sudden prick of compunction. "Sure now, woman dear," she said, kind and blundering, "I won't be very long away. 'Deed then, it's bad I'd think of lavin' you lonesome, and you so helpless, if there was any chance of them murderin' thieves comin' about. But they're quit, thanks be, they're quit. We seen the last of them, plase God, that time we only heard them. I'll be back agin twelve wid news of Christy."

"Musha, but it's the quare, foolish talk you have, Molly," said Brigid. "I wonder what differ at all you consait 'twould make, you bein' here, if them ones happint in on us. Not a ha'porth, unless 'twas harm. The best chance would be if you was out of it, the way you couldn't gab us all into worser destruction. But there's no fear to-day. Step along wid you, in the name of God, and be bringin' the lad his bit of food."

"Between us and harm—oh the Lord have mercy on us!" Mrs. McEvoy cried out so immediately that it might have been in answer to her sister; but it was not. For at that very moment the front door had flown open, and as it were some terrible glare of a scarlet dawn came flinging itself in around them. The whole place seemed to be flooded with it; yet after all but a couple of men in red coats, and a third in murky blue, had entered the room. Stricken dumb, the two women stood blankly staring at them.

At first the soldiers could not see clearly in the tempered light; and while one of them kept his back to the door, his comrades made rapid dashes into every corner, to prevent the escape of any lurking fugitives. All three were tall men: the stout, blue-caped Hessian had a sleek, heavy-jowled face, and a straw-coloured fringe showed beneath his hat; the sergeant was lean, and sunburned to a deep uniform red, like the body of a mayfly, which made his sandy hair look several shades lighter than

his skin ; the private was so young that a boyish pink-and-white complexion still went incongruously with his six feet of stature and elaborately martial mien.

“ Well, ma’am,” said the sergeant, coming forward, assured that there was nobody else to get away, “ ‘tis an airy visit we’re payin’ you.”

“ Ye’re welcome, sir,” said Mrs. McEvoy, dropping an abject curtsey.

“ Are we now ?” said the sergeant, with sarcasm in his northern accent. “ And where’s that brave laddy, Mr. Christy McEvoy, might I ask ? We want a word wi’ him, and a friend of his, by the name of Timothy Lanish, let us know we’d be apt to find him hereabouts gin we speired.”

“ Twas a fool’s errand he sent you on then,” said Mrs. McEvoy, “ for there was niver any such a crathur seen or heard of in this house since the day it was buildin’.”

“ Aw, gi’ us no more of that foolery,” said the sergeant, “ or we’ll soon find a stopper to put on it. Like enough he’s not in this house the now ; but the man Lanish said we’d aisly get his direction here. ’Twould be our readiest way to come by him, he said.”

“ May his soul roast blacker for that same like a fly on the candle wick,” said Brigid Coyle softly.

“ So we’re after lavin’ our bastes below at the Cross there,” said the sergeant, “ till we pick them up agin tother end of the glen, that the rest of us

is makin' for by a circumbendibus. And you needn't suppose I'll be delayin' our lads there any great while, hearkenin' here to your bedlam lies. By the same token, ma'am, where the mischief at all might you be startin' off to at this hour of the mornin'?" he said, pulling Mrs. McEvoy by her cloak. "Hoots now, 'twould be very handy if so happen 'twas about payin' him a visit you were; for that gait we could all just step along together wi' you."

To this suggestion Mrs. McEvoy said nothing. Her denial had exhausted all the resources of her invention, and she could only gaze at him helplessly.

Suddenly there was a munching sound behind them, and a thick voice saying half-articulately through obstruction something like: "Schmeckt nitt schlecht." The Hessian's little blue eyes had lighted on the basket of cakes, which stood conspicuously on the table. Poor Hans Bauerstein's range of ideas was strictly limited at the best of times, and in this foreign land a main source of them had been quite cut off by his scanty acquaintance with any language except his own. He devoted himself much, therefore, to silent and acquisitive observation; the objects that chiefly interested him were edible and drinkable substances. Consequently it was but natural that he should quickly scent out the cakes, one of which did scarcely more than make a single morsel for

his capacious mouth. He had just finished it when his exclamation drew the others' notice, and on seeing what was happening, Mrs. McEvoy uttered a wail of grief. At this time she was in a somewhat strange state of mind. She knew full well that the arrival of these men had practically sealed her son's fate ; yet the only part of the matter that she seemed to realize with poignant anguish was the fact that they would hinder her from bringing him his griddle-cakes, the little hot cakes which she had been making for him so happily a few minutes ago. "What'll become of him at all ?" she said aloud to herself despairingly, as the Hessian swallowed another, "and he starvin' over there wid the hunger since yesterday."

"You misfortunate *stronsach*, what else will you be gabbin' out to them next ?" Brigid muttered at her elbow.

"Over yonder is it, in the place you call the Crooked Hole ?" said Sergeant Lawson. "Sure enough now, 'twould be a pity the likes of him was kep' waiting for his breakfast. Fetchin' them along to him you'll be directly." He put out his hand and took a cake, keeping his eyes fixed, with a pleased twinkle in them, on her sorrow-stricken countenance. "You, Ditcher, and you, Hill," he said, "quick march up them stairs wi' you, and take a look round aloft. After that we'll make this one step out and show us the way. T'other ould yattercap can bide where she is." So saying,

he shoved the uncomprehending Hessian in the direction of the staircase. Hans quitted the basket with reluctance, which he expressed by giving an earthenware water-jug, standing in his way, a kick so violent that the shattered fragments flew about the flooded floor. Two pairs of weighty top-boots were presently clumping and clanking overhead.

“I don’t care a curse whether they find anything up there or no,” the sergeant reflected audibly as he ate his cake; “we’ll get all there is to be had out of the young rogue before we’re done with him.”

“I’d be very thankful to you, sir,” Mrs. McEvoy said tremulously, and with a furtive glance at her sister, “if I might be bringin’ him the few cakes itself. He could be aitin’ them goin’ along, and not delayin’ you e’er a minyit.”

The sergeant did not apparently hear, and sauntered over to the foot of the stairs.

“I wisht to God,” Brigid said under her breath, “that somebody was goin’ to him who had the sinse to know the best luck for him is to be gettin’ them provoked and annoyed till they’d take and knock him on the head soon and suddint. If I could but put me unlucky foot straight under me that far itself, I might ha’ made an offer to be doin’ something. But poor Molly wid her bits of cakes —och the crathur.”

“You two there,” Sergeant Lawson shouted up the stairs, “stir yourselves and be comin’ down along out of that. It’s nobbut wastin’ time we are.”

Molly McEvoy stood ruefully fingering her diminished cakes and rearranging their disordered rows. She was thinking that there were still over a dozen of them left for Christy, if only she could get them to him. Her sister watched her for a while with a sort of disdainful compassion. Then all at once her countenance changed ; a gleam came into her eyes ; some sudden thought seemed to run through her with a shock and thrill.

"Sure now, Molly woman, I'm thinkin' they'll let you take the basket along anyway," she said, "and that'll be a great thing. But look at the way the cakes is stickin' to one another all in a lump. You'd a right to give them a good sprinklin' of flour. I'll fetch a bit."

She sped over to the corner where the meal-chest stood, and returned with a white-heaped saucer, the contents of which she began to dust thickly over and between the steaming cakes. "There now, isn't that a dale better ?" she said. "Never you mind touchin' it, Molly ; you'll only whiten your hands and make a show of your cloak."

Molly, looking on, was a little comforted by Brigid's more hopeful tone and manner.

The saucer was cleared, and the basket hanging on Mrs. McEvoy's arm just by the time that the two men came down, empty-handed, though the pockets of the Hessian' bulged.

"Off we'll be now," said the sergeant, "and this one with us. The straighter she takes us where

we're wantin' to go, the better 'twill be for herself and the pack of them. There's plenty forby herself can show us the Crooked Hole ; and aiblins she has a fancy for the roof burnin' over her head, and she sittin' roped up safely within. You never can tell what notions folk may have, but I'm always wishful to satisfy them. Step along."

Brigid hobbled up to her sister, and was beginning a whisper, when the sergeant interposed. "No coggin' and cosherin', ma'am, if you'll be so good," he said, and flung her violently off, at the same time wrenching her crutch out of her hand. She fell huddled up against the wall under the window ; an incident whereat Hans Bauerstein's guffaw had the grace of perfect unaffectionation, which was in some degree wanting to Private Hill's. "Better rue sittin' than rue flittin'," Sergeant Lawson commented, as he and the Hessian between them hustled Mrs. McEvoy out at the back door.

Only a few yards here separated them from the wood, which flickered in the sunny breeze, with a footpath skirting its edge. Before they struck into this, a slight delay occurred, because the farm-yard's big white cock, stirred to emulation by an antiphon of distant crows, indiscreetly posted himself on a tub close by the door, and was half through a fervent response, when young Hill passing could not resist the impulse to use a newly acquired weapon, and severed the tempting, outstretched neck with one slash of his blade. The red-wattled

head flying past, and the queer, strangled crow, made the other men look round. "That was the fine bawl you're after sheddin' in two, sonny," said the sergeant, seeing what had happened. "I wonder now would it join to again, if you clapt the ould noddle back on it. But, mind you, Hill, you needn't be so glib dalin' wid our hayro down yonder, for 'tis somethin' more to the purpose than crownin' might come out of *his* head before we raip it off him. What d'you say, ma'am ?" But it was all lost upon Mrs. McEvoy, whose thoughts were away at the Crooked Hole, now become so terrible a journey's end. Then the Hessian had a disappointment, being ordered to drop the cock's body, which he had picked up with a murmur about "lecker-ische Suppe"; and the party went on their way.

Meanwhile Brigid Coyle had scrambled to her feet again, and she passed out at the front door, limping rather more than usual. The early morning sky with its shimmer of silver-white and hyacinth-blue confronted her, canopied the wide green country, which fell away softly to the seaward. Close at her feet, as in a thousand fields around, every grass blade had its burning bead, and every low furze bush its magic web, iris-spun, threading diamond spray. Their glistering whorls and arabesques were written everywhere, like some wizard charactery that none could decipher. All the clear-voiced birds were singing to the time-beat of shrill cocks' clarions; a wood-pigeon crooned near

at hand ; and even a loitering cuckoo called from far off where the trees grew dim in the mist.

The lame woman, swinging herself along up a narrow strip of a paddock, had no leisure to heed any such things. She was making for a gap in the hedge on her right, from which, if she could reach it in time, she would get a glimpse of her sister and the soldiers going down a long vista of the wood path into the glen. As she went she talked softly to herself, interrupted now and then by want of breath, or the need for special care in crossing a rough patch of ground.

“ She’d think it’s quare and cruel I’m grown these times, aye would she belike ; but sure herself, that was took afore all the troubles began, doesn’t rightly know. And God knows I mightn’t be a very wicked woman entirely this day, if it wasn’t for what they done on me poor ould father. Och the divils, the divils, the black divils, the worst wish in me heart’s too good for them, or the likes of them. Troth, it’s glad I am to be thinkin’ of that same happenin’ them, even supposin’ it wasn’t for the sake of Christy. Woman dear, ‘twould be a cryin’ shame and a sin to not rid the countrhy of them, if we could ; and I’d a great wish for Christy ever, the poor lad. . . . And, glory be to God, there’s a good chance now wid the little cakes. That big, outlandish fat one’ll be swallyin’ all he can get, as sure as if ‘twas a snout he had on him in a pig’s trough ; and him wid the ferret’s eyes

'ud ait them up on her out of spite to torment her, if it was nothin' else. 'Tis only the young fellow I'm aught afeard of; there's maybe some sort of nathur in him. But anyhow 'tis a good chance altogether, a good chance."

This brought her to the gap in the thick, blind hawthorn hedge, and brought her at a lucky moment, for those of whom she was in quest had just halted well within both her sight and hearing, as she crouched warily behind the screen of boughs. They were standing in a lattice-work of sun and shadow at the end of a long, straight path, which ran down piercing the steep greenwood. Molly McEvoy in her dark hooded cloak and frilled white cap made the miserable centre of the group, while the red-coated sergeant and the blue-caped Hessian were with jests and laughter helping themselves from her basket of cakes. The young private stood looking on. When his comrades had filled their hands, he moved a step nearer to her, and she suddenly caught him by the sleeve and said, "Listen to me now, for the love of God. I'm thinkin' you're a dacint lad. Don't go take them all on me; lave me a couple in it for me own poor boy, that hasn't had bite or sup since a great while before the sun-settin."

At this appeal Brigid drew in a shuddering breath, as if she had been stabbed. "Och the unfortunate fool," she groaned almost audibly; "it's lost Christy is, if she gets her way."

As for the young soldier, he paused for a long moment irresolute. The cakes smelt delicious, and the fresh air had made him really hungry ; moreover, any that he did not eat would certainly be gobbled up by that hog of a German. But what actually decided him was his becoming aware that Sergeant Lawson had begun to watch his hesitation with little sharp-cornered eyes, whose twinkle expressed the amused surprise which their owner could not just then put into words.

“Why, you wouldn’t begrudge me one, ma’am,” Private Hill said, laughing uneasily, “and if they’re not too good, I might content myself with that.”

He made a rapid dive into the basket, and finished a cake in two mouthfuls with an air of bravado in reply to the sergeant’s expression, afterwards clapping his dusty hands together with exaggerated vehemence. “You’ve mixed a trifle too much salt or something in them, ma’am,” he said, “but they’re tasty enough,” and he swallowed a second cake.

“Thanks be,” said Brigid Coyle ; “they’re all safe now, every one of them.”

“Step along wi’ yous now,” said the sergeant. “ ‘Tis time we were gettin’ shut of herself, and her salt, and her cursed young whelp. Get on out of that, you Ditcher, and don’t stand mouthin’ and grimacin’ there. You know the way, ma’am, and if you take us an inch out of it, you’ll be apt to find as much agin of could steel runnin’ into you. Drop that blasted basket and come on.”

They all turned into the path and moved away down it. Brigid rose to her feet and stood for a moment in the gap leaning on her crutch. "Like rats," she said, looking after them. There was hatred in her eyes, and horror, and a kind of joy.

AN INVINCIBLE IGNORAMUS

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I

“ **I**T’S themselves are the great villins,” old Mrs. Gahan was saying, when Mac began to heed the conversation. He had come out after tea with Molly Lennon, the housemaid, to pick raspberries down at the far end of the kitchen-garden, where only a grassy dyke, surrounded by intermittent privets and hawthorns, divides it from the orchard. On this dyke, at a gap, was seated old Mrs. Gahan, returned from fetching milk up at the farm-yard, while by her stood two or three neighbours, also with cans under their shawls, and Fergus Gilligan, the ploughman, on his way home from the mangold field. They had talked a long while before Mac, having eaten as many of the small, soft, red thimbles as seemed good to even a six-year-old taste, found leisure to pause and listen. “ Great villins,” Mrs. Gahan said, “ and thieves of the world entirely them doctors do be. They’d as lief cut off a body’s arm or leg as look at it any day.”

“ Aye, would they, and liefer,” said Katty Doyle, “ and they chargin’ pounds and pounds for doin’ it.”

"That's what they're after now, wantin' to fetch poor Miss Gracie up to Dublin, you may depind," said Mrs. Gahan ; "wunst they get her up there, they'll have the little wake foot off her in next to no time, and lame her for the rest of her life, that won't be long, the crathur."

"Twinty pities it is the Colonel to be away the now," said Julia Hegarty ; "himself wouldn't let one of them widin an ass's bray of her. Ragin' he'll be when he hears tell of it, for Miss Gracie was his great darlint ever, from the first day he set eyes on her."

"Little he had to do then," said Mrs. Gahan, "to be puttin' a stepmother over her, and she not the size of a sandhopper, nor the young mistress scarce three years in her clay."

"And takin' off wid himself to the end of the world after that again, and lavin' the little crathur to contind wid that one alone," said Julia Hegarty. "The laist he might do would be to stay and purTECT her. But what chance has she now at all?"

"Sorra one," declared Mrs. Gahan ; "the stepmother's young and flighty in herself, supposin' she's nought worse. Glad enough she'd be of an excuse for takin' a jaunt up to Dublin, if it was about cuttin' the head off poor Miss Gracie they were, let alone the foot."

"And it might as well be the one as the other, in my opinion," Katty Doyle said gloomily ; "forget her death she will among them all, that's cer-

tain, and she a very delicate little fairy of a thing ever. Goodness may pity her—two Dublin doctors terrifyin' her on the one day ; and Willie Byrne, that dhruv them over from the station, said they were as ugly-lookin' big men as ever you witnessed."

"This Mrs. George has no likin' for the Abbey sure enough," said Molly Lennon ; "it's only of an odd while she stirs out of the house, and to-day she was tellin' her own maid about packin' the boxes—so Kate Macredy says. And after the luncheon the ould master rung for Mr. Fitzgibbon, and he——"

"Whist now, and don't be talkin'," Mrs. Gahan said in Gaelic, suddenly becoming aware that a small sun-browned face framed in a halo of straw-hat brim was looking through a raspberry bush, and that the dark-blue eyes belonging to it had an alert and interested expression.

"Ah, sure Master Mac has plenty of wit ; he wouldn't be repeatin' a word he hears," said Molly Lennon.

"Great stuff and nonsense I'd be repeating," said Mac. "I suppose somebody's been putting ideas into your heads that it's hard enough to get out again. And I suppose you think that doctors go about with axes and hatchets in their black bags as if they were Jack the Giant-killer, who never was any such person in reality. Why, I dare say even Miss Grace doesn't believe that."

"True for you, Master Mac," said Fergus Gilligan, whose shock of grizzled black hair and encroaching beard had framed an aggrieved and anxious countenance as he listened. "There's some people's tongues might be shortened a trifle anyway, and no harm done. It's the quare ould gabbin' they have about nothin' in the world, for I dunno what they consait ails Miss Gracie, unless it's expectin' her to be leppin' hedges and ditches, and headin' haystacks they are. And I defy forty stepmothers to offer to do a hand's turn agin her, no matter where his Honour is; he'd get word of it one way or the other. But I'm steppin' along home, and good night to yous all."

"I'll go with him," said Mac, scrambling up the bank and jumping down on the other side, all except a square shred of brown-holland sleeve, which remained behind, thorn-grabbed. "Sticky hedges are a plague," he remarked, as he joined the big man, who was walking away.

"Will you be lavin' Master Mac up at the house, Fergus?" Molly Lennon called after them across the long tree-shadows and gold-on-green interspaces of the westward-sloping orchard.

"Foolish in his mind Fergus does be about Miss Gracie," said Mrs. Gahan, "the same way he was about the young mistress. But rael comical did it be to see him carryin' her up and down, when you might as well take and lift a kitten, for any weight she was, and makin' as much work over her as if

he'd never heard tell of e'er another baby in Ireland. And now he won't let on aught's amiss wid her, barrin' the stepmother, that he can't abide the thoughts of. So what wid it all he's in a fine distraction these times, and talkin' onraisonable, poor man."

The flushed rays of that same sunset were still dazzling the windows along the seaward side of the big house, where Fergus Gilligan duly left Master Mac. As he stumped down the long passage to his room, a door on his right hand stood ajar, emitting a wedge of amber light, and through it a voice called, "Oh, Mac, won't you come in and say good night to Gracie?" while a second voice added shrilly, "I likes the Big Boy, if it's him. But I needn't say good night to anybody for hourses and hourses."

In a bow-window across the wide room Mac saw two girls sitting. One of them was quite an old person, being about twenty, and the other, being four, a mere infant ; so Mac reckoned ages. Her flossy head was much the colour of a little duckling's, which made the pansy-brown eyes seem strangely dark, especially as they contrasted again with the faintest tinge of shell-pink in a disproportionately small face. A miscellany of toys lay strewn around her, discarded for the amusement of rolling her stepmother's rings about the floor. The sunbeams kindled many-hued sparkles in them as they ran hither and thither over the slippery

grass matting ; and when one circled out of reach she followed it with difficulty, neither walking nor creeping, but pulling herself along by legs of tables and chairs in a helpless sort of way. It was this, and not any probable mishap to her trinkets, that caused their owner to look on with concern.

Indeed, the twelve months since her marriage had made Sylvia Rowan feel as if her score of years had been doubled, so many were the cares that they had brought. First and chief of these was her husband's appointment to the command of a military expedition into such outlandish regions that exile to another planet would have been hardly a more "separable spite." Hence her establishment at Inverdrum Abbey, remote in wildest Mayo, where old Sir George, her father-in-law, feeble in health and spirits, emerged from his study only to utter dismal predictions, or let fall inadvertent regrets at his son's remarriage ; where the same sentiment was more or less overtly expressed by a household who looked with disfavour on the successor of "the poor young mistress" ; and where her little stepdaughter, in whom she had hoped to find an object of the happiest interest, had soon begun to show very disquieting symptoms. "Frittin' after the poor Colonel," was the general diagnosis, to which the speaker commonly added : " and sure what chance has *he* of ever settin' foot here again ? " Matters improved somewhat by and by, when her nephew, little Mac Barry, was lent to her for the

summer. Mac had been a friend of hers before her marriage, and although he now saw fit to call her "Aunt Stepmother," a title which she disliked hardly less than Grace's crude "new mamma," he did not withdraw his countenance from her, nor entirely withhold his company from Grace, who unwittingly humoured him by describing him as "the Big Boy." Both children had a favourite, whose good opinion she did not possess.

One morning, shortly after her arrival at Inverdrum, she was coaxing Grace to eat an appreciable quantity of breakfast, when the child said wistfully, turning away from her dainty repast, "I'd like Figgy-Giggy."

"Oh, I wonder if we can get it," her stepmother said, brightening up. "Kate, Miss Grace says she would like some figgy-giggy. What is it? A sort of jam?"

But Kate disappointingly replied, "Sure not at all, miss—ma'am. It's the name she has for me sister's brother-in-law, Fergus Gilligan the ploughman, that does be carryin' her about of an odd while, and showin' her his horses. Poor Miss Gracie wouldn't look at e'er a bit of jam these times if it was made of pearls and diamonds." Mrs. Rowan listened with an anxious mind.

But on this brilliant midsummer day her troubles had reached a doleful crisis. What Kate Macredy termed "a powerful wakeness settled in Miss Gracie's foot" having led to a consultation of

eminent specialists, their verdict was by no means reassuring. It suggested a sojourn in Dublin for treatment, including plaster bandages and possibly an operation, a word which filled Mrs. Rowan's heart with vague terror. Sir George when appealed to had declared that in such hopeless cases it was our duty to clutch at every straw. Then he had rung for his butler to announce that Mrs. George would be leaving the Abbey in a few days ; and he had reflected, not without a gleam of satisfaction, that he need not dress for dinner when she was gone.

His daughter-in-law was too much oppressed with responsibility and alarm to feel any relief at the prospect of quitting dreary Inverdrum. Still she saw the expediency of taking a cheerful view, and with that intent she now said to the children, "Don't you think it would be very nice if we all went to Dublin next week, by train, you know, and stayed there for a while ?"

"Rather middling nice it might be, if it wasn't nasty," said Mac ; "but *I'm* not wanting excuses for taking jaunts to places every minute. And I dare say the sea doesn't reach to it, so that there's nothing except dirty dry roads for a person to walk on."

"I don't want to go in trains," said Grace. "Figgy-Giggy'll bring me wif the horses."

"Let me tell you," said Mac, "that if anybody was caught destroying the streets of Dublin with

horses and a plough, the polis would put them all in prison, with handcuffs."

Upon receipt of this solemn warning Grace flung a small handful of rings clattering across the floor, and said vehemently, "Oh, I won't go anywhere at all. I'll stay here wif Kate, and she'll show me the waves comin' in." So Sylvia could not flatter herself that her plan had made a favourable impression. As for Mac, he collected the rings carefully and hung them on a button-hook. "She's sleepy," he said, "and fractish." Grace, who seldom gave way to tantrums, watched him with large eyes full of remorse and awe. "If you were a good enough little girl," Mac said to her severely when he had finished, "perhaps Kate might show you the Isle of the Blest, that's floating in the sea not so very far off from here. Pat Denny saw it one day when he was out in the Sound beyond Inish Bofin fishing with his poor father, may he rest in glory. It's the same sort of place as heaven, Fergus Gilligan says, and I should think it was handier to get to than Dublin. Couldn't we go there instead, Aunt Stepmother? In a boat of course. I dare say Gracie would like it better than the train, she's so easily frightened of nothing."

"Oh dear, Mac, it's all nonsense. There's no such island, and we couldn't possibly go to it," his aunt said, more decidedly than usual. His suggestion struck her as being ill-omened and slightly profane.

So Mac went off, somewhat affronted in his turn.

II

One afternoon, not many days later, Mac was again in the kitchen garden. Red raspberries still glowed softly among their silvery-lined leaves beneath sunshine that was still high summer's, but there had been time for a tragical event to happen at Inverdrum. On the very evening before they were all to have started for Dublin, Gracie had herself taken by Kate Macredy to see her beloved big waves rolling in. Kate as usual wheeled the little carriage to the opening of a footpath cut round the sea-cliff, at whose base a white rim of the Atlantic perpetually chafes and foams. Hence it was supposed that, also as usual, she set out with the child in her arms to walk along the narrow path ; this, however, could be only conjectured, for neither of them had reappeared. The empty perambulator with its fleecy blue and white rug aflutter in the breeze, waiting at the entrance of a track which led nowhither save to wide ocean, confirmed the searcher's darkest fears. Sure-footed and careful as Kate Macredy was known to be, it seemed plain that some fatal slip at one of the many perilous points had sent maid and child headlong into the depths below. "And 'deed now ten or a dozen people, let alone a couple," said old Mrs. Gahan, "might very aisy be droppin' down over the edge there, like slates slitherin' off a roof, and nobody the wiser, unless it was the say-gulls.

And sight or light of them may ne'er a one else behould till the Day of Judgment ; or by chance they might be got to-morra washed up widin a stone's throw of the very same place."

Such woeful alternatives had been generally accepted as alone possible long before this bright Saturday afternoon. For Mac, indeed, the tragedy had already begun to loom far off across the hazy distance of three weeks filled with the capacious days by which his time was still measured. He had become used to missing Grace and Kate Macredy, and to seeing Aunt Stepmother grown a sorrowful little black figure silently moping, and to hearing the calamity discussed from every point of view by the other members of the household. It had been on the whole a tedious period, especially as Fergus Gilligan had also waxed gloomily taciturn, and was working in an inaccessible field. The coming of Mac's favourite Aunt Amy on a visit to her sister had latterly in some degree compensated him for this loss ; but just at present she was engaged in entertaining a large family party, which the arrival of two or three sets of condoling cousins had fortuitously brought together. Mac's experiences were in fact illustrative of his often-propounded theory that people one doesn't want are always everywhere, for he had failed to find indoors any congenial haunt uninvaded by the stranger. From the drawing-room he had been routed by the sudden trooping in of the first detachment ; two

unknown ladies had greeted him effusively as he passed through the hall ; and when he turned for refuge towards the library, a sound of unfamiliar voices gave him timely warning ere he reached the wrong side of the half-open door. Some one was speaking in a high-pitched, excited tone.

“ Oh yes, the elders wouldn’t hear of the match, on account of insufficient means, so it had to be broken off. There was a most impassioned parting scene. I believe he went down on his knees and kissed the hem of her garment.”

“ I always wonder,” said a calmer voice, “ who relates incidents of this kind in the first instance. Hardly the principals, one must suppose—but who else can know ? ”

“ Well, at any rate,” the other voice rejoined, with a touch of resentment, as if at being checked in a flight of romantic fancy, “ it’s a fact that Leonard Meyrick was seen in the village yesterday. So as Amy Barry came down here only last week, he certainly hasn’t lost much time in getting within reach of her again.”

Mac had not stayed to hear even this fragment, but had betaken himself out of doors, making by a warily chosen route for the kitchen garden. It seemed to him the safest asylum, because, he argued, “ if one goes where there’s flowers, they’ll be coming out bothering, and saying, “ Oh how *lovely* your chrysanthelopes are ! Is that a souvenir-dear-John ? ” He had neglected, however, to bear in

mind the possible attractions of small fruit ; and so it happened that as he approached a large gooseberry bush, a figure hurriedly rose up from crouching in a skin-littered space. This was an elderly gentleman, who looked at once disconcerted and relieved by the interruption and the insignificance of the interrupter.

“ Hullo, young man,” he said, “ I suppose you’ve come to look for some of these ambers. I can recommend them highly.”

“ No, thank you,” said Mac, with sincere politeness, “ I’d a great deal rather that you went on finishing them all yourself.”

He was chagrined at finding that his great-uncle preferred to enter into conversation ; however, as it turned upon agricultural matters, in which they both were interested, he did not feel it irksome. With pleasure he listened to an account of the Clontragh cart-horses, and in exchange imparted much information, on the authority chiefly of Fergus Gilligan, enriched with experiences and theories of his own. By the time that they had walked twice round the garden, Mac had formed a favourable opinion of his new acquaintance, and when the latter spoke of returning to the house, thought it but friendly to put him on his guard. “ You’ll find it full of all sorts of strange people,” the warning ran, “ girls and old ladies in black. Aunt Amy’s busy minding them, so you won’t be able to get her to do anything. And you can’t imagine the

nonsense they're talking, all in a gabble together, like the hens being fed."

Perhaps Mr. Staveley bethought him of his wife and daughters as among those whose conversational gifts were thus appraised ; perhaps, too, he remembered the undignified attitude in which he had been surprised, and wished at parting to leave a more suitable impression ; or perhaps he considered it his duty to seize this last opportunity of repressing self-sufficient tendencies in his youthful kinsman. At any rate he replied, " Ah well, young man, we mustn't expect people to be always talking like wiseacres. They may have too much sense to do that. And nobody, I assure you, knows quite all about everything—not even the youngest of us, though he may be a great hand at opening drills and grubbing mangolds. I hope you'll learn a little ignorance before you're much older."

This sarcasm, cruelly pointed with its allusion to some small vaingloryings, did not miss its mark. Mac turned away from the garden-gate, seriously mortified by the discovery that he had done quite the wrong thing. Overmuch knowledge, it appeared, was a mistake, which actually led to unfavourable comparisons between a Person and the persons whom he considered most absurd. He pondered over this new problem set by a perplexing world all the way down the cow-lane, and across Big Barnawn meadow, to the Lennons' cottage, where Fergus Gilligan lodged. It stood

in a field, the furthest-off edge of which was waved with sand-hills, letting through blue glimpses of sea ; and here he hoped to find Fergus returned from work, not that Fergus's company was by any means what it had been before the loss of Miss Gracie.

Nobody was about near the cottage, but just as Mac reached it, a flock of sheep began to defile one by one through a neighbouring gap in the fence, and to disperse themselves slowly over the field. He stood still to watch them so intently that he did not know old Michael Lennon had come out until a voice said close by, "Well, Master Mac, is it thinkin' to head them back you are? Ne'er a bit of them miscreants'll be controlled by aught barrin' the dog ; we must get Glen to them."

"No," said Mac, checking the interruption with a wave of his hand, "I'm only counting their legs. Just stop a minute—two, three—this one has four."

"Whethen now, Master Mac, I'd suppose you knew that much widout goin' to the trouble of reckonin'," said old Michael.

"Indeed I don't," said Mac, who seldom did things by halves. "The wisest person on earth," he averred with solemnity, "couldn't tell you how many legs a sheep has without counting them, unless he was a perfect idiot, and thought he knew everything in the world. It might have growed a different number. Now here's two of them coming at once, I mustn't stay talking."

He resumed his counting, while the old man, after looking on for a few moments with a concerned expression, went back into the house. "I hope to goodness," he said to the two people whom he had left in the kitchen, "that the little young gentleman isn't goin' wrong in his head on the Family over and above everythin' else. He's outside there now talkin' rael foolish, and he was used to have plenty of sinse."

Fergus Gilligan and Molly Lennon, who had been deep in discourse during his short absence, found him as disturbing as Mac had done.

"Twould be the thousand pities bedad," Fergus remarked despondently.

"Sure it's only natural for childer to be talkin' oddly," Molly said, reassured by more experience; "nobody minds them. As for Master Mac, he has me tormented these times romancin' about the Isle of the Blest out in the say there. Yesterday he was wonderin' whether it was there the drownded people went to, because it would be more convanient like to them than heaven, he said. Quare and ould-fashioned he is, but right enough in his head."

"Faix now, that same might be the very way to manage it," Fergus said meditatively. "If he took that notion about it, ne'er a one of them would think aught he said was any more than romancin'."

"I'd a right to be steppin' along now and fetchin' him home," said Molly.

Outside the door Fergus and she took up the thread of their discussion.

"If you could give me e'er a hand wid conthrivin' it, Molly, yourself 'ud be the great darlint entirely."

"Aye, would I! It's the fine darlint I might conthrive meself to be. But there's some people 'ud liefer be a darlint widout conthrivin'."

"And who's sayin' but what yourself's that sort as well?"

"Sure maybe so, Fergus, if you wasn't took up ever wid somebody else or somethin'. And supposin' now he went, and aught mishappint him—"

"What harm at all 'ud he get comin' along wid me for a bit of a row in the little boat, if it was fine to-morra, the way he done times and agin? Only the Family's delicate about his goin' on the water the now; as if one drowndin' was bound to bring another follyin' it, like them sheep leppin' through the gap; so 'twould be handier if I got to taking him unbeknownst."

"You're the quare man to consait 'twould be unbeknownst, wid the child himself tellin' the whole of it—whatever it is—the minyit he comes back."

"I wouldn't put it past Master Mac to have the wit to hould his tongue. And 'twould do near as well if the rest of them had the wit to not believe any quare talk was out of him. At all events we must chance it."

“ Well then, if he goes off wid you to-morra, I needn’t let on anythin’ about the boat, and belike that’ll contint you, for what more can I do? But you’ll not be keepin’ him out after dark, or we’ll all go distracted together.”

“ Iligant ’twill contint me, Molly jewel ; and we’ll be home agin along wid the crows, whatever happins,” Fergus assured her. “ If seein’ Master Mac doesn’t pacify her,” he added to himself, “ what’ll I do at all? for she might soon destroy herself frettin’. And she thrivin’ real grand till she took this fantigue about him. The conthrariness of things is untould.”

III

The strip of strand that runs by Inverdrum Abbey was basking in sunshine on the third morning after this conversation, and along with it basked young Leonard Meyrick, who had established himself on some tumbled boulders near the mouth of a sandy-banked lane. Outwardly he was doing nothing except bask, inwardly he was meditating in no satisfied mood. His thoughts were, however, presently diverted by the emergence from the boreen of a very small boy in brown holland and broad-brimmed straw hat, who came stumping down with a determined and purposeful air. On reaching the strand he stood still for a moment, and then trotted a little way to the right, but soon

halted again, and upon consideration ran back about as far in the opposite direction. Here he came to a dead stop, pausing for a while in evident perplexity ; after which he slowly and intermittently approached the heap of boulders, glancing towards them from time to time with a wistful irresolution. Accordingly, when he came near enough, Leonard inquired whether he were looking for anybody.

“I suppose you’re not a policeman ?” Mac replied interrogatively. “Not any kind of a one —even in the wrong sort of clothes ?”

“I’ve got nothing to do with the police at all,” said Leonard, who believed this to be a reassuring statement. But Mac looked disappointed. “Then I don’t want to find my way, thanks,” he said in a reserved tone, “at least not till I get to the barracks.”

“You’ll have to walk a good step before you come to any barracks,” said Leonard ; “I dare say I may know the place as well as a policeman. And you needn’t *ask*, you see,” he added, connecting Mac’s difficulty with precepts of prudence, enjoined upon him probably by city caretakers, “only just say where you are going.”

Mac put aside this disingenuous sophistry with due disapproval. “It would be the same thing only different,” he said firmly ; “besides, now that I think of it, nobody could tell anybody the way to a person who’s mostly walking about.”

“If the house he lives in doesn’t walk about

along with him, you might wait there till he comes home," Leonard said.

Mac, who did not consider himself on jocular terms with the stranger, vouchsafed no direct reply to this suggestion. "The greatest big baby on earth," he observed presently, bethinking him of newly adopted views, and finding a retort therein, "wouldn't suppose or imagine that it knew the way to everybody's house, when there's dozens and millions of them, so that nobody knows which is which except the postman."

"Unluckily I'm not a postman either," said Leonard.

"If you were anything *at all*," said Mac, "I suppose you wouldn't be sitting about doing nothing at this hour of the morning."

"True for you," Leonard admitted, somewhat ruefully.

"Of course it's your holiday perhaps," Mac hastened to add, apprehending that he had delivered a rash judgment. "Barney McQueen often has one on Monday. He says it's a poor case for a man to be workin' like a baste of the field from morning till night, so he takes a day off now and again, to make sure that it isn't an old cart-horse he is all the while. Maybe that's what you're doing."

"Oh, I keep Saint Monday all the week," said Leonard, "if you know what that means."

"I know nothing about saints," said Mac, "except that they have gold plates round their heads

in pictures, to show how goody-goody they are. I don't believe there are any of them living on the Isle of the Blest, so they must all have gone to heaven."

But Leonard gave only a divided attention to Mac's hagiology, for as he listened it struck him that there was something familiar in the tones of the clear, high-piping voice, and the expression of the small, shrewd, sun-brownèd visage.

"I say," he interrupted, after an earnest scrutiny, "did you come from Inverdrum Abbey, Sir George Rowan's place?"

"I did so," said Mac; "it's only along the back shrubbery, and down the cow-lane, and across the two big fields, to the gap that's stopped with furze, but anybody who isn't the size of a bullock can get through into the boreen."

"Why, then, you must be my old friend Mac Barry," said Leonard; "I was sure I'd seen you somewhere, but, of course, you've grown a good bit in a year. Do you remember last summer in Connemara, how you scared your Aunt Amy out of her wits one day when you were paddling in the lake and lost your hat? And how I trundled you home afterwards on my bike? You hardly would remember, though, all that time."

Mac looked at him meditatively for some moments. "I think I do remember that I've forgotten you," he said; "but if you're the bicycle man, I can tell you Aunt Amy remembers all about you."

"Does she, by Jove!" Leonard exclaimed, sud-

denly sitting up straight. "How do you know that, Master Mac?"

"How could she have asked me yesterday whether I recollect the time we met you at the lake near the bog, if she hadn't recollected it first herself?" Mac demanded, with the air of a logical tomtit. "It's easy enough recollecting anybody when you've got a photograph to put you in mind. And she has a photograph of you in her writing-case that fell off the table when I was passing, and everything tumbled out on the floor; so then she asked me if I remembered you. The only thing we lost out of it was a little old bit of white heather that we couldn't find again. It was all withered up, but Aunt Amy creped about on the floor ever so long looking for it. She said it was a keepsake."

"And did she say anything else about me?" said Leonard.

"She said about you that it was very good-natured of you to give me a ride; and she said about you"—Mac had to reflect between these reminiscences—"that we had a very pleasant walk home—and that it was a lovely summer last year—and that things were very different now. But, of course, that *wasn't* about you at all."

"Unless she thinks it is my fault, you know," said Leonard.

"Why," Mac said, opening wide eyes of amazement, "it *wasn't* you that drowned Gracie and Kate Macredy?"

“What on earth put that notion into your head?” said Leonard.

“It’s in your own head, not mine,” said Mac, “for the reason things are different is because Gracie’s drownded. It was a quare upset altogether to Aunt Stepmother,” he continued, reproducing public opinion with much fidelity, “and she’s took it greatly to heart. That’s why Aunt Amy’s come to be company to her and cheer her up. But when Aunt Amy’s fretting herself, I don’t see how she can.”

“How do you know that she is fretting about anything?” inquired Leonard.

“Why, if she isn’t, I’d like to know what she’s fretting about,” said Mac; and no rejoinder being ready, he went on: “Look here, couldn’t you come some day and see if you can do anything to amuse her? I dare say she’d like better than anything to watch you and me riding your bicycle up and down the straight walk; and if she wanted to I wouldn’t mind letting her walk on the other side to steady it, though there’s not the least occasion.”

“There’s nothing *I’d* like better, indeed,” Leonard said regretfully, “but I’m afraid that your aunt mightn’t—things are different, you know, and I’m a different thing.”

“Is she out with you?” Mac inquired, after some consideration of this statement.

“Well, I believe she is,” said Leonard.

“Black out?” said Mac.

"What do you call being 'black' out?" said Leonard.

"Well, if I was black out with her," Mac proceeded to define, "and if I wanted to ride a bicycle on the straight walk, I'd tell her that I didn't care whether she was too huffy to look at me or not. And if I was *very* black out with her," he added reflectively, "I'd maybe say that I didn't see what anybody wanted with a set of ugly old aunts bothering about. But, of course, you needn't say that to her unless you like; for I suppose she isn't your aunt really—and, besides, you're maybe only a little black out. You could just take no notice of her at all."

Leonard, however, felt that this gracefully simple line of conduct was not for him. "It would never do," he said.

"What are you out about?" inquired Mac.

"It wouldn't be very easy to explain," Leonard said, truthfully enough; and he added mentally that, anyhow, it would be rather a shame to fill the little beggar's mind with the intricacies of a plot petty and mean, such as had wrought the troubles which were now crossing his hitherto pleasant and careless paths. The story was a version of the Dog and the Shadow, complicated by the character of the False Friend. For bone, there had been the offered secretaryship—not a great prize, indeed; still, enough to make an engagement seem not entirely out of the question in the eyes of foreseeing

elders ; enough, likewise, unluckily, to be an object of desire to another person, who accordingly had diverted Leonard's attention to the Shadow, in the shape of a much more brilliant, but quite unattainable appointment, thereby deluding him into a refusal of the substance, and then hastening to secure it for himself. Promises of secrecy, and loyalty to the disloyal, had prevented Leonard from divulging the misrepresentations by which he had been induced to throw away his chance ; so that his conduct looked like a foolish caprice, or a lazy wish to shirk any occupation ; while to the person whose opinion on the subject he most regarded it might suggest something even worse than that. Thus had it come about that he was dawdling aimlessly through the golden July weather, undergoing a tedious visit to some uncongenial country cousins, for the sake of being in the neighbourhood of Inverdrum Abbey, where he, nevertheless, could not venture to present himself. A very rough outline only of these difficulties could be given to Mac.

“ You see,” said Leonard, “ as you say, I’m out of work.”

“ So’s Tim Lauder,” Mac said encouragingly, “ but he was sacked for nothing at all. He just stayed away one day to go to a decent man’s funeral, so next morning old Peter Molloy up and told him he might step home and wait for the next burying there would be in it. Tim Lauder says

that if it was Peter's, he'd follow it with a heart and a half. I don't blame him."

"Well, but I had the offer of a job," said Leonard.

"And didn't you do it?" said Mac.

"I didn't, because somebody put it into my head that I could get a better one," said Leonard, "and by the time I found out that I couldn't, the first job was gone."

"That was as unhandy as anything," Mac said solemnly. He seemed to be casting about for precedents among the experiences of his rustic friends, and finding none he passed on to another view of the matter. "I don't see that it's any business of Aunt Amy's whether you got it or not. She hasn't to be supporting you in idleness when you're not working, has she?"

"Certainly not," said Leonard.

"Then it's all nonsense for her to be out with you about it. How do you know that she is? Everybody doesn't know everything," Mac asserted, with a sententiousness formed upon his great-uncle's, "except of a very odd time," he added, lapsing into the style of a less dignified model. "I shouldn't wonder if all the while it's only that she's fretting about Gracie being drownded in heaven."

"Drowned in heaven!" Leonard said aloud, but meaning the comment for himself; "that sounds quaint enough."

"Well, if it isn't exactly heaven, it's next door

to the same thing, Fergus Gilligan says, and he's going backwards and forwards this thirty year or more, so he ought to know," said Mac. "That's what Aunt Stepmother's fretting about, partly, at any rate, and partly because she wanted a jaunt to Dublin ; but now I suppose she's got no excuse. And Mrs. Gahan and the others say that she'd have let the doctors up there be the destruction of Gracie by way of curing her foot. But I think not ; for Fergus Gilligan said he'd make it his business to see there was no such bad work done on her as long as he had a head on his shoulders, and they'd be troubled to reap that off him."

"Who is this Fergus Gilligan ?" inquired Leonard.

"He's working for the old master, man and boy, all the days of his life," said Mac, "and he's mostly ploughing with Tartar and Diamond ; and he's got two prizes at a ploughing match, over the best in three parishes ; but sometimes he and I go out sailing in the *Granuaile*. I steer. And when we're rowing, he and I can pull Murty Ryan round with one of both our hands—easily. And Mrs. O'Rourke says he always was like a body bewitched about Miss Gracie and her poor mother the young mistress before her. That's why he has no opinion of stepmothers. But it's only Aunt Amy I want him to take along with us."

"And it's Fergus Gilligan that you're looking for now ?"

“Yes,” said Mac ; “he said he was very apt to be down on the strand this morning after lobsters, but I don’t see him anywhere. I want to ask him about Aunt Amy and the boat. She couldn’t come out to-day, because they must write to Gracie’s father, for they’ve put it off so long that they’re afraid he might see in a newspaper about Gracie being drownded, she said. And then she said it would be better to call Aunt Stepmother Aunt Sylvia again, for she wasn’t anybody’s steppmother now. So I asked her if people hadn’t any steppmothers in heaven ; and she said she thought not, and that Gracie had her own mother there, and didn’t want anybody else. So then I asked her if Gracie’s own mother was a very old, old woman, in a cap with white frills to it the length of your arm ; and she said that Gracie’s own mother was quite young, and never wore a cap. So then I told her that she thought wrong, for Gracie wasn’t with her own mother at all, or anybody in the least like her.”

“What on earth made you say that ?” said Leonard.

“That’s just the same thing that Aunt Amy asked me too,” said Mac, “but of course I didn’t tell her. And I think we might bring her in the boat and show her. She’d like to see where Gracie is, and Gracie’d like to see her, I dare say, if we left her there for a bit, while Fergus and I were fishing. That would be the best plan.”

“It would be an atrocious plan to play any pranks of the sort,” Leonard said, jumping up. “I hope to goodness that she doesn’t really go out boating in those crazy little canvas catamarans. They would be lunatics to allow her.” Then, rather abashed at finding himself take the situation so seriously on such vague grounds, he reverted to Mac, who was eyeing him sternly. “But I say, Mac, this friend of yours seems to talk a good deal of nonsense to you about taking you to see your poor little cousin, and that sort of thing. I wouldn’t repeat it to your aunts if I were you; it might vex them, and you may be sure that he is only making a fool of you.”

“And who’s repeated things to my aunts at all, I’d like to know?” said Mac, wheeling round, and walking backwards in front of him, so as to transfix him with scornful glances. “I should think that even if you are a most senseless great idiot, you might have heard about the Isle of the Blest, where the drownded people live, when you can see it quite distinctly before your very eyes just round this corner. But I’m going now to look for Fergus, and you needn’t believe that I was over there yesterday seeing Gracie, if you don’t like——” Here he tripped up over a stone, but recovered himself quickly, and his stump off across the shingle was a very perfect expression of dignified affront.

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A quarrel with this newly recovered acquaintance Leonard did not, however, by any means desire, so much really valuable information seeming likely to emerge from among the wild and witless statements insisted on with such tenacity. He hastened accordingly to rejoin Mac, who, far from implacable, was easily propitiated by a serious inquiry about the position of the heavenly island. He pointed with confidence to a craggy shape, which lay softened by the sunny haze out on the mother-o'-pearly sea-lawns, having come into sight, as he had predicted, when they rounded a jut of the cliff.

"That's it," he said. "Do you see the little weeny nick out of the rock just below the green patch on top? When you get there it's big enough for the boat to fit in quite well; and that's where we landed yesterday, and went up and saw Gracie, and the old woman who isn't her mother, and Kate Macredy. Gracie's twice the child she was before she got drownded, and she can put her two feet under her, and walk right across the floor. She's as happy as the day's long, the old woman says, playing with bits of shells and things at the door, and never a complaint out of her, except just the one time she took the notion into her head, whatever ailed her, to be crying for the Big Boy—that's me. So Fergus brought me to pacify her; and the old woman said it was no sort of thing to do; but she

supposed he'd bring over a mad bull raging wild, if the child fancied it, and the one might be apt to do as much mischief as the other. And Fergus said, 'Och whist, mother ; I done accordin' to the best of me judgment.' And that's what I did too. My best judgment was to amuse Gracie playing with the shells. We played ninepins, and she gave me one to bring home. Here it is ; she thinks it's a scallop, but it's really only a cockle-shell." Mac produced it from his pocket with a forbearing air, and continued : "I suppose when people have been drownded they're so glad to get into any kind of dry place at all, that they aren't wanting to go away again, even if it's rather nasty. If it wasn't for that I don't see why anybody should like being in such a little rockety heaven. There's not a thing in it hardly except stones and slithery seaweed, and the field's as slanty as the roof of a house. Gracie doesn't mind it a bit ; but I can tell you Kate Macredy, her maid that was drownded the same time, hates and detests it. She came running down the path after us, when we were going home, and I heard her telling Fergus that if she'd known what a dreary little doghole of a place it was to be shut up in, she wouldn't have let him spirit herself and the child away to it, not if he'd talked blarney enough to bewitch an old crow."

"Did she say that, by Jove ?" said Leonard.

"And she wanted to come along with us in the boat," said Mac, "only Fergus wouldn't let her

offer to set hand or foot on board. And she screeched after us that it was a heavy charge we'd all of us be getting, and finding ourselves locked up before we knew where we were ; which is great nonsense, for I don't believe the police care a pin whether she came back with us or not. And, besides that, who was to look after Gracie ? There's no harm in me telling *you* about it," Mac interrupted himself to explain, "because you're not any of the people who mustn't hear a word, or there'll be blue murder in it. You're not one of the servants, or the polis, or the Family, or anybody *at all*."

"I'll tell you what, Mac," said Leonard, who had been rapidly reflecting while Mac argued thus, "this would be a jolly day for a sail, and I know I can take out the yacht. What would you think of running over there with me now, and paying Gracie another visit ?"

To judge by Mac's way of jumping up, high and straight, at hearing the proposal, he thought very favourably of it indeed ; and though his verbal answer was more sedate, it conveyed assent : "It mightn't be too bad," he said, "and I think we'd better go this instant." So they turned their faces without delay towards the moorings of the *Dana*.

That evening about sunset the little yacht, with all her sails spread, like a white butterfly of amplest pinion, came stealing and fluttering back, making her way to the Abbey pier. Very slowly she came, for the light breeze had fallen, so that she could

only creep in short, mouse-like runs over the smooth floor, where wild-hyacinth tints shimmered into silver and gold. Her approach was being watched from the strand by several people in several excitements, which increased as the six persons on board gradually became recognizable. Peter Byrne and Larry Sullivan, the boatmen, were not indeed much here nor there, and the General's nephew was an object of quite minor importance ; but Master Mac's presence caused a feeling of relief, for his somewhat happy-go-lucky friend had neglected to leave any message about him, and he had been missed for some hours with regretful apprehensions. "Suppose something had took and happint him too."

When, however, the remaining two passengers, though carefully shawled, were at last identified as Miss Gracie and Kate Macredy, interest waxed intenser, and took differing hues. Those among the onlookers who were not in Fergus Gilligan's secret, which had been kept with, on the whole, wonderfully few leakages, stared aghast at what they regarded as ghostly visitants, and then fled, invoking the protection of the higher powers that alone could cope with such an emergency. Others, more enlightened, who had been watching the *Dana's* movements with anxious minds, now saw their gravest surmises confirmed, and for the most part repaired with the news to the contriver of the plot.

"I wonder where your aunts are likely to be, Mac?" Leonard said, as he escorted his small party up from the landing-place, feeling rather at a loss to know how he might best introduce it.

"Sitting up in Aunt Stepmother's room they always are," said Mac, "for she won't do anything but mope, and set Aunt Amy a bad example. Moping is doing nothing at all, and looking as if everything you saw was about a mile off. It's as stupid as can be," Mac added explanatorily.

"Do you think you could find your Aunt Amy, and ask her if she would speak to me for a minute, without telling her why?" said Leonard.

"Considering that I don't know why," said Mac, "and that I do know where she is, I should think I could." And he set off without waiting for further instructions.

That was how it happened that Amy Barry did not finish her walk down to the strand. She had gone out in a sorrowful mood, produced by meditation on subjects such as the likelihood that her sister would fret herself into a serious illness, and the fact that Leonard Meyrick had been quartered for days past in the adjoining demesne without making any sign. For the moment, however, her uppermost thoughts were anxious ones about Mac, of whom, she had just been informed, "nobody had seen sight or light since breakfast-time." Therefore, when a turn in the shubbery walk disclosed a small holland-coloured figure posting

along towards her, she felt relieved. "Dear me, Mac," she said, "where have you been all day?"

"With the bicycle-man in a *Dana* yacht," said Mac. "Him that you're black out with, you know, about the job he wouldn't take, and the one that he couldn't get. But all the same he wants you to come and speak to him. I don't know why. He's got Gracie along with him, and Kate Macredy, that we brought back in the yacht from heaven on the Isle of the Blest. I thought that people had to stay there always when they'd been drownded, but the bicycle-man says that they aren't drownded at all; and Peter Byrne in the yacht says that they weren't *rightly* drownded anyway; and Larry Sullivan says Fergus Gilligan is the lad who could tell us all about it if he hadn't more wit than to stop to be asked questions. So, will you come along and speak to him?"

"Where is he?" said Amy.

"Down at the pier," Mac replied, as he supposed truthfully; but the others had followed him and now came into view. Leonard was carrying Gracie and listening to Kate Macredy's voluble statement of grievances. At the sight of each other both parties involuntarily halted, and Leonard afterwards declared that Amy's eyes grew large enough to have beheld an ocean liner full of spectres. But Gracie desired to be put down, and making straight for her with a sturdy firmness of gait, uttered a far from wraith-like request. "Where's Figgy-

Giggy?" she said. "And I wants the big bowl full of stirabout."

"Do you intend to go on being out with him?" Mac inquired of his aunt in an audible aside. "He doesn't want to, I know, and I think myself it's not very nice of you, after us taking the trouble of bringing back Gracie, because you were fretting about her, and he says that he and I are the luckiest fellows in Ireland to have got the chance."

"Oh, Leonard, I don't understand it a bit," Amy said, "and you can't wait to explain it now, for we must get back to the house at once, or that dreadful letter to poor George Rowan will have gone to the post, which would be a terrible thing. Sylvia had just finished it when I came out. How heavenly it will be to tear up the detestable black envelope!"

She set off running, and Leonard, having picked up Gracie, ran too. Mac following, at a distance perforce, judged from the way in which his aunt was accepting the assistance of the bicycle-man's disengaged hand that they were no longer black out.

In the Abbey farmyard, a few days later, Mac conferred upon Leonard Meyrick the privilege of an introduction to his own older friend and oracle, Fergus Gilligan, who, contrary to the neighbours' predictions, had neither gone off with himself nor been lodged in Galway jail. Some talk of legal proceedings had indeed ensued, but had quickly

subsided ; for Gracie's return, so much safer and sounder than when she had gone, disposed every one to take a lenient view of Fergus's part in the matter. Fergus himself had by this time become reconciled to the betrayal of his conspiracy, having formed the opinion that to keep Miss Gracie on the Inish unbeknownst until his Honour's home-coming would in any case have been impossible ; and, moreover, that she might do well enough under the stepmother, who was not maybe, so to say, a very wicked woman after all.

Fergus also confided to Leonard a further reason for satisfaction with the turn affairs had taken. " You see, sir, makin' up a match between Kate Macredy and meself her people and me own people are this good while. Not that I'd any great wish for it ; I'd a dale liefer have Molly Lennon. How-an'e'er, I wasn't goin' agin them, and they were settlin' us to get married at Michaelmas. But now, since she was stoppin' a while on the Inish, where 'tis livin' meself I'll be, whenever me mother quits out of the little house, Kate says she wouldn't look at me if I walked on me two knees after her round Ireland, which I'd be long sorry to do ; for she says she'd get her death wid the dreariness of it in a half-twolvemonth. So it's meself and Molly is about gettin' married, and maybe it's all as well that Master Mac knew no better than to be talkin'."

Mac, who was standing on tiptoe, holding on with both hands to the top of the pigsty's door,

over which he could just see, reverted an indignant countenance, but replied with composure, "As it happens, I did know a great deal better than to be talking. But I never said I knew everything. And what I don't know now is why a pig wriggles all over itself the whole time it's eating its bit of food. I wonder if a human person could?" And he resumed his observations, with a view, possibly, to future experiments.

About this time a small band of white men, in rather sorry plight, were forcing their way through a Central African forest, which held them in its meshes like moths in some huge and baneful web. Their anxious chief, who was a Connaught man, often solaced himself through toilsome days and wakeful nights with the remembrance that if they emerged some weeks thence into semi-civilization, he might soon hope for tidings of the little girl whom he had left among wide green fields, beneath cool grey skies, far away in Connemara. He never dreamed that a letter, fraught with news which would have blotted out all his forward-looking thoughts, had been prevented from voyaging out to him, and only just prevented, by the indiscreteness of a very small boy in brown holland.

THE MORROGHS' DREAMS

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AT Ardroe Farm lived the widow Morrogh with her son Jim and his aunt Kate. Every evening Kate covered up with old sacks or inverted creels the drowsy, roosting cocks, lest they should disturb her sister-in-law the next morning by untimely crows, a precaution which, as Mrs. Morrogh was not an invalid, proved her to be on some other grounds a person of much importance in the household. How she had become so did not appear plain. It was certainly not by industrious and energetic habits, for Kate and Jim did all the work without either help or counsel from her. When times were busiest she lent no hand; when difficulties looked most puzzling she offered no suggestion. Her idle days were spent by the hearth in cold weather, and in warm at the little parlour window, which looked down the Ballydrum road.

Neighbours passing by saw day after day her white cap, and a bit of her grey and lilac shawl, glimpsing through the muslin blind; whereupon Mrs. O'Doherty, a gaunt, stirring old woman, once remarked that it would be "a charity if the other two stuck her up in their pitaty patch to scare the crows, the way they'd have her doin' somethin'

besides sittin' wid her hands before her." But they never did perform this charitable act. All her expeditions out of doors were to chapel on Sundays and holidays.

At night she slept on the only feather bed, beneath the thickest blanket or the best patchwork quilt, according to the season. And every now and then she had a dream. The reason why this is worth mentioning may be gathered from a conversation between Jim and his aunt Kate one March morning at breakfast in the kitchen. Mrs. Morrogh had hers in bed.

"You wasn't thinkin' to be at the fair to-day?" said Kate Morrogh, who had tilled so many crops and carried so many turf creels, besides cooking and cleaning and contriving, that she looked weather-beaten and careworn beyond her two score years. Jim was but half as old, and had still a youthful, although often anxious, countenance. He gazed fixedly at his plate of stirabout as he answered, "Well now, I had a notion of takin' in the strawberry calf."

"You'd the notion of a great fool then," said his aunt, "for it's twice the price we'll get if we hold on to her for a bit, till the grass is grown, and people do be wantin' the likes of her to put on theirs."

"Och, but you see Herself was tellin' me this mornin' she's dreamin' this good while back," said Jim.

"Dreamin'? Ochone, don't be sayin' so, this day of the year, wid the pitaties and everythin' run out, and nothin' comin' in," said Kate.

"Dreamin' she is," said Jim, "and there's no use denyin' it; for so she was sayin' just now, and I bringin' her the cup of tay."

"And what at all might it be this time?" said Kate.

"Och, an umbrella," said Jim.

"I hope she's well," said Kate. Jim said nothing. "I hope she'll be gettin' her health finely till then," Kate said again. "Musha, cock her up!"

"It's only worse we'd make it wid puttin' her off," Jim said in an experienced tone. "Do you mind last year, when she was dreamin' of a new taypot? Every day we were delayin', she was thinkin' of some other shape or pattron had a right to be on it, till me heart was scalded lookin' for the one would satisfy her, and she none too well plased wid it in the end. She's apt to be takin' notions about the colour of the umbrella or the handle, or goodness knows what. I've seen a dale of diff'rnt handles on them in Sweeney's shop-window, rael expensive-lookin' ones some of them was. But this mornin' an umbrella's all she's talkin' about, and any kind of a one 'ud contint her."

"Where's me poor father's ould one, then, that's leanin' up behind the door there?" Kate suggested desperately.

"I thought of it meself. She's says it's only a

skeleton bewitched it is, and that she wouldn't be seen settin' fut outside the door wid it. And sure enough the cover's hangin' in flitterjigs intirely," said Jim. "So I was thinkin' I'd better be drivin' in the calf. As well first as last. Micky Walsh of Abbeystown mightn't make me too bad an offer, if he's in it. He had a great wish for her mother, that I know."

Toward sunset that evening, when shadows stretched their longest, and embers of light in the west burned behind bars of iron-grey cloud, Mrs. Morrogh's head disappeared from the parlour window, and was to be seen at the front door, which commanded a better view of the road. As she stood watching, a brisk little breeze made her cap frills flap on her light-brown hair, and fluttered stray locks across her light-blue eyes, and freshened up the faded pink in her soft, plump face, which was just now crumpling itself into more peevish puckers every minute, for she had calculated that Jim might easily be home by four o'clock, and here it was close on six, without a sign of him.

"What was delayin' him at all?" she had wondered several times to Kate, who had little leisure to look out; and Kate as often replied, "Ah sure you couldn't tell but it might ha' been a very late fair; or maybe he had somethin' to be doin' afterwards up in the town."

This was the most direct reference that she could make to Jim's real business in Ballydrum, as on

such occasions it was not the etiquette at Ardroe Farm to recognize any connexion between Mrs. Morrogh's dream and Jim's purchase. On the contrary, she always declared herself unable to imagine what could have put the notion into his head.

Still, even the vague allusion to the coming umbrella was pleasant, and at first made her resume her look out contentedly. But as time went on it failed to soothe, and she shook her head at it with mournful irritation, saying she supposed the fact of the matter was that he had gone off to amuse himself with the other lads, and would spend every penny he had in the world, and not be home till all hours of the night. To these unfounded conjectures Kate, with secret indignation, turned a "bothered ear," until, when dusk brought no sign of Jim, she herself grew a little uneasy ; and then she said with reassuring confidence, "Och, woman alive, don't be talkin' foolish. He's done no such thing, you may depind. Sure, I'm just after bakin' the bit of griddle-bread for his supper. What 'ud ail him not to be back directly now ?"

If she had but known, what ailed him was this.

Jim had regretfully sold the strawberry calf, "not too badly considerin'," and had then repaired to Sweeney's shop in the main street, where, after a protracted scrutiny of the wares displayed in the wide window, he had effected a purchase, which made a large hole in one of his two grimy little

pound notes. That was a pity, of course, but how else could anybody expect to acquire what the young lady at Sweeney's described as "an exceedingly superior article with a guaranteed paragon frame"? On the whole he was well pleased with his bargain, so much so that when, on his muddy tramp home, he reached Carriglas cross-roads, he stopped to refresh himself by taking another look at the extremely ornamental handle. Long rays were just striking down through the young fir grove, whose straight, fine stems are strung in the hollow between two up-sloping fields ; and under the dazzling red light that carved knob and spray of silvery shamrocks and flowing silken tassel seemed to him more beautiful than ever. He could not refrain from slipping the slim-furled umbrella half out of its shiny American-cloth case to survey its symmetrical green folds.

"She'll be in a great admiration of it, the crathur, any way," he said to himself, as he carefully pulled the case on again.

It is not a prudent thing to stand in the middle of four roads, intent on safely tying up, with clumsy fingers, a precious parcel ; and so Jim learned from a teacher whose terms are high and methods rough. For suddenly out of the winding left-hand lane bounced one of Andrew Dill's biggest farm-horses running away with an empty cart. An obstruction so trivial as Jim hardly checked the ponderous gallopade, and when the great shaggy

feet and grinding wheels had plunged by, it would have been in no way surprising if he had really lain, as the people who picked him up unanimously declared, "kilt entirely, and all knocked to bits."

In fact, however, he had escaped with injuries which the doctors at Ballydrum Infirmary, whither he was conveyed in Behan's mule-cart, did not think likely to prove fatal. No expert opinion was needed upon the case of the wrecked umbrella, which lay crushed into the mire beside him. With splintered stick, twisted wires, and tattered cover, its plight was clearly hopeless, and its wretched remains eventually became the plaything of some little Dalys from the nearest cabin.

An exaggerated version of the bad news reached Ardroe soon after dark, and brought Jim's mother and aunt post-haste to the infirmary, in a despair out of which they could with difficulty be persuaded. Their relief at finding him still alive was very soon lost in a deepening anxiety. Jim had somehow got a chill, pneumonia set in, and presently the most cheerful of the nurses could say nothing more encouraging than that if he took a turn the right way within the next couple of days or so, he *might* get over it yet. Unhappily, Jim seemed to be turning in quite the wrong direction, and, moreover, everybody said that he was not giving himself a chance with the way he kept on fretting over something.

This was true enough, and plainly enough, too, appeared the reason of his fretting. It had been impossible to hide from him the destruction of the new umbrella. "Sure, didn't I feel the stem of it snap under me in two halves, and I comin' down? 'Tis the last thing I mind rightly," he said himself. And as his fever rose, the loss loomed with fantastic bulk upon his imagination. The thought of his mother's disappointment continually possessed him, and was the theme of the rambling talk in which he persisted with painful effort. Vainly did Mrs. Morrogh protest that it "wasn't a thraneen of matter about the umbrella: sorra a bit of her wanted one at all." Jim went on lamenting hoarsely, between coughs and gasps, that she had set her heart on one altogether.

"Dreamin' of it on and off she is this long while back, she was tellin' me. And how at all am I to save the price of another, even supposin' I get out and about again to-morra, to look after everythin' that's goin' to wrack and ruin on us, wid nobody unless Aunt Kate trapesin' around?"

"I might as well ha' bid him go and destroy himself as ha' talked that trash to him about dreams and umbrellas. And now he won't mind a word I say, no more than if I was the wind keenin'," Mrs. Morrogh said with remorseful bitterness, one evening, when she and her sister-in-law were trudging home from a visit to the infirmary. And

Kate replied despondently, "Sure there's no use now in lettin' on you don't want an umbrella, when well he knows, for all he's so light-headed, that it's just to pacify him; for what other raison would be like to set you agin havin' one?"

"I hate the thought of it," said Mrs. Morrogh, "and me heart's sick tryin' to tell him so."

But on the next morning when they were back again in the whitewashed hospital ward, by the bed that was the centre of all their hope and fear, she endeavoured once more to gain Jim's attention. He was tossing about weakly and restlessly, and wondering whether he would get the price of an umbrella for the old hayrick, if it wasn't burnt down, and if he could carry it in to market anyhow in a six-foot sack. He misdoubted he ever would. "And there was his mother, the crathur, sittin' in the window, lookin' out for him to be bringin' it home."

"See me here, Jim avic," Mrs. Morrogh said, capturing and holding fast a hot, feeble hand. "Just listen till I tell you the quare things I was dreamin' last night."

"Och wirra," Kate said to herself, "is it tormentin' the poor lad she'd be now wid her ould dreams? I wouldn't ha' thought she'd have the heart to go do it."

"Sure now, Jimmy," said his mother, "it's dreamin' I was I was walkin' along the road to chapel, under the great teems of rain, and houldin'

up the grandest new green umbrella ever you laid eyes on. Fine it was entirely, and an iligant body I was consaitin' meself, goodness forgive me. But if I was, Jimmy, the very minyit I turned into the straight bit of road along by the lough, after me come a flurry of wind, and caught a grip of the umbrella that nearly wrenched the arm off of me shoulder, and had the two of us whirreled over to the water's edge before I could tell what was happenin' me. Bedad I might as aisy ha' been contindin' wid a mad bullock as tryin' to control it, and head-foremost into twelve feet of deep water 'twould ha' dragged me, if it wasn't only that just that instant of time out of me sleep I woke, all of a cold thrimble. So Jim alanna, isn't it the rael good luck that I'm ownin ne'er such a thing whatever ? After that dream I wouldn't set fut outside the door wid an umbrella in me hand for all the money in Ireland. For you never could tell when a blast of wind mightn't set it tuggin' you off your standin' and landin' you in the middle of the deer knows what sort of destruction. Och, it's no opinion I have of umbrellas ! ”

“ ‘Deed, then, that would ha' been the bad job—to be drowndin' you,” said Jim. “ It's lonesome I'd be, missin' you out of the window. But if it's frightened you are of umbrellas, I've no call to be troublin' meself thinkin' how I can't contrive you e'er a one.”

“ Sorra a bit need you, avourneen,” said Mrs.

Morrogh. "I wouldn't go widin a mile of one if I could help it, let alone touchin' it."

We cannot, of course, be certain that it was the result of this communication, but undoubtedly Jim did very soon afterwards fall into a quiet sleep, from which he woke with his face set towards recovery. His progress went on so steadily and swiftly that before many days had passed he was at home again, sitting by the kitchen fire, hungry and rather fractious, as convalescents are wont to be, and daily gathering up strength to grapple with the spring work, which had fallen into sad arrears during his illness.

He often thought regretfully of the strawberry calf, the sale of which had proved worse than useless, and he sometimes said to himself that he was afraid his mother need not have e'er another dream this good while yet, for anything he would be able to get her. Some of the Morroghs' neighbours recommended them to claim compensation for Jim's mishap from Andrew Dill, who had the reputation of being as rich as a Jew and as mean as dirt. But others believed that nothing would come of it, because of the way in which Jim seemed to have been "moonin' about and not mindin' what he was doin'" at the time of the accident. And as the predominant opinion was that "every penny you got at law cost you a shilling," no steps were taken in the matter.

One April morning, when Kate Morrogh was

alone in the kitchen, waiting for the others "to come and ait their breakfasts before they had the stirabout destroyed on her," which is a somewhat temper-trying occupation, she heard calls from without, and going to the door, saw Mr. Dill himself sitting at the gate on his side-car.

Kate Morrogh was a person of strong opinions, which her circumstances seldom allowed her to express with much freedom and effect, but this interview seemed to give her an opportunity. Her greeting to Mr. Dill was therefore voluble and vituperative, professing amazement that he should have the face on him to drive by their door, let alone draw up his old bag-o'-bones of a garron at their gate, and he after as good as doing murder on her poor nephew with his ungovernable brutes running wild on the public roads, and not offering so much as a penny out of his pocket.

But it takes at least two to make an audience, and Andrew Dill was not apparently inclined to be one of them, for he hastily handed her a blue envelope, saying, "Ah, whist, ma'am, and bring that in to young Morrogh. I'll call round again for the balance of your oration the first time I've no chance to be hearin' an ould hin crawkin' anywhere more convenient to me own place. Come on out of that, Jewel."

And when the envelope was opened, it contained nothing less than a five-pound note.

In the course of that same week Jim paid another visit to Ballydrum, and this time returned without misadventure. His mother and his aunt, who hurried in from the yard to welcome him, found him rapidly unpacking something, which he stowed away behind the dresser. But in reply to their questions about his doings, he began to relate what seemed a quite irrelevant story.

"I didn't tell you the quare dream I was dreamin' last night," he said. "Comin' out of chapel I seen you and Aunt Kate, and it rainin' in sluices on your good bonnet. So says you to her: 'Afraid of me life I am,' says you, 'to be houldin' up me new umbrella here, for fear the wind 'ud take me off of me two feet, and have me drownded in the deep water,' says you. And wid that, what does meself but snaps it out of your hand and whirrels it up over your head? 'Bedad, it's the oncommon blast of wind 'ud take *me* off e'er a one of me feet,' says I. 'And what's to hinder me,' says I, 'of carryin' it for you every wet day of your life?' This-a-way," and Jim seized and expanded a fine brand-new umbrella with a hurry that swept off the shelf behind him a candlestick, which fell clattering to the floor, where it would have succumbed to its injuries had its material been more fragile than tin.

"Och, Jim avic, but you're the great villin!" his mother said ecstatically.

"Sure, you were havin' ne'er a dream this long

while," said Jim, "so I thought to make shift wid a one meself."

"I wonder now would it be any use if *I* tried a bit of a dream," Kate said, standing a little aloof, and looking at them with a sort of half-envious glee.

THE LIBBY-ANNS

THE LIBBY-ANNS

I

ON Sunday mornings, a few years ago, the townsfolk of Lisnagort, returning from Mass, sometimes met three short persons shabbily dressed in black, who were the Libby-Anns from No. 5 Main Street on their way to Rathallen Church. So, at least, they were commonly described, the fact that mother, daughter, and granddaughter bore the same Christian name having come to the neighbours' knowledge, and somehow taken their fancy. To speak of them by this collective title had long since grown into a matter of course, yet still retained a faintly jocose flavour. If there had been anything solemn to say about them, the speaker would have tried for the occasion to recall their surname. Beyond that, the young and youngish people knew little about them, and had an impression that No. 5 had been their home for an indefinite period, dating vaguely from time out of mind. The older inhabitants, however, were better acquainted with their past history, even remembering Mrs. Gavin's first arrival at Lisnagort. With her small daughter she had fled thither,

about thirty years back, as to the only refuge left her amid the wreck of her family fortunes. For her husband had died overwhelmed with debt accumulated during a disastrous career on the turf, which had swallowed up his estate, and bedraggled his good name in a quagmire of insolvency. Yet her grave financial difficulties were perhaps the least significant part of her troubles at that time, as the death of ne'er-do-well Tom Gavin had followed hard on the loss of two children carried off by a vulture-like swoop of diphtheria, thereby leaving her in possession of only little Libby-Ann, the youngest child. Her eldest, Edward, had been always brought up by her own parents, in whose charge it now became of course more than ever desirable that he should remain. They on their part, being somewhat austere and self-righteous folk, were anxious for his complete dissociation with his failure of a father ; so at an early age they packed him off to business in the United States, whence no tidings of him ever reached Lisnagort. Then when after a dozen dismal years, her daughter's fairly promising marriage to a solicitor's clerk kindled some gleams of prosperity, they were speedily extinguished by the sudden death of poor young Arthur Whelan within less than a twelvemonth from his wedding-day. Whereupon a portentously dark cloud settled down over No. 5 Main Street, and was very slow to lift.

Probably it would have been difficult to find in

Ireland a duller little town than Lisnagort, which is saying a bold word. At the Libby-Anns' end of Main Street the road, as broad as a good-sized meadow, was nearly as green. Over the way most of the houses were vacant. One that was occupied belonged to an undertaker. At the other end, where market-place and shop-fronts expanded, there was more stir and traffic, though seldom anything at all lively, except on a fair-day, and often not even then, as business tended to be slack. Sounds either of town or country life rarely broke the stillness of No. 5. It was a tall, thin slip of an old red-brick house, its high, narrow windows set flush with the exterior surface of the walls, giving a singularly unobstructed view to right and left. They looked sunlessly north, and a dusty, cobwebby mist perpetually dimmed their small panes, for Mrs. Gavin declared that it gave her the cold shivers so much as to think of anybody breaking her neck leaning out to clean them, and accordingly nobody ever leaned. Not less grey and obscure was the spiritual atmosphere in which the household dwelt. As she struggled along in penury with a girl-widow and a girl-baby unprovided for upon her hands, Mrs. Gavin was excusable for imagining herself dogged by ill-luck, and for constantly expecting fresh calamities to overtake her. A touch of the McBales' grimness and gravity predisposed her to such views, making more violent her recoil from former spendthrift

ways. Even when by dint of the extremest economy she had got sufficiently beforehand with the world to be reasonably secure against positive want, she continued her pinching and screwing and counting of halfpence with unnecessary rigour. Her daughter and granddaughter grew up in a black frost of poverty that kept their pleasure very closely nipped.

It was poverty edged with pride that barred them from all intercourse with their neighbours. Mrs. Gavin's coming down in the world had been embittered by its happening in the presence of her acquaintances, for her husband's farm was not many miles out of the town. Fain would she have moved far away, but the old house in Main Street was her own property, and she could not afford to forego its shelter. She did, however, entrench herself therein, ignoring as far as possible the existence of all the world outside it, with the result that its inmates soon became of no account, save as an occasional theme for languid conjectures or threadbare facetiousness, when there was nothing better to speculate or be witty about. One of these old jokes was to declare that the three Libby-Anns were liker each other than three pennies, because they hadn't any date on them to distinguish the youngest from the eldest. This exaggerated the fact; but to a casual observer the three small, black-clad figures walking in a row differed so slightly in appearance as to make it hardly realizable that they comprised a woman

approaching three score and ten, and a girl not yet twenty. The neighbours' general impression was that the youngest Libby-Ann had been quite grown-up for ever so long. She had indeed been tall for her age when a child, and at nine or ten years old was little shorter than her mother ; but after that she never increased much more in stature, reaching eventually just the height of her diminutive elders. Her resemblance to them was accentuated by her dress, which usually consisted of garments passed on to her from parent or grandparent, unmodified by any alteration into wear more suitable for a little slip of a girl. It would have been necessary to look twice at a dowdy old black shawl, or even to peer under the brim of a large antiquated bonnet, before any one could perceive how very youthful were the form and face that they concealed.

Rarely enough were the Libby-Anns to be seen abroad, except on church-going Sundays, but now and then they went for walks, and two incidents connected with these excursions always stood out clearly among little Libby-Ann's reminiscences of a curiously uneventful childhood. The earlier of them happened when she was about six. They had gone along a road which they as a rule avoided, because it was on the way to the old home at Glenesk. It brought them past the workhouse, a large, many-windowed building, stony and staring, set conspicuously on a low ridge. Presently they came where above its road-wall appeared the ugly,

foolish faces of two half-witted men, who spent much of their heavy time, poor souls, in grimacing at the passers-by. Their aspect inexpressibly shocked and saddened little Libby-Ann, and as she saw, or noticed, nobody else about the place, she leaped to the conclusion that they were typical specimens of the indwellers. Now, merely the remotest possibility that she might ever find herself shut in along with such dreadful beings would have seemed very terrible to her ; but her grandmother's daily warnings and predictions gave the prospect a fearsome likelihood. Often did the child eat her bread and treacle grudgingly and reluctantly, hungry though she might be, lest her extravagance should incur the doom of a sojourn amid surroundings haunted by those nightmare faces. Thus the big, grey house threw a dark shadow across the sad-coloured days of her youth.

The second incident, which occurred a year or two later, left brighter memories, although it had entailed some perplexity and disappointment. One mild forenoon on the threshold of spring, the pleasant sunshine tempted her grandmother and mother to ramble out further than usual into the green country, whither she rambled with them, perforce, but nothing loth. They had come to a place where the lane was hedged in by furze and sloe bushes, when from the grass-field behind them sounded a throbbing of horses' hoofs, and through a gap some few yards ahead rushed a number of

queer-looking mottled dogs, which crossed the road to a gap on the other side. These were followed by a green-coated horseman, after whom rode what appeared to the little girl a great crowd of people, men, with a sprinkling of ladies—she had never before seen a lady on horseback. Her two elders were scarcely less moved at the sight than she was, herself. Her mother exclaimed in amazement, and her grandmother said in an eager and explanatory tone, “The Dunmassey Harriers!” Then, much to little Libby-Ann’s gratification, they went and stood at a gate, from which they had a good view of the hunt’s career over a wide stretch of pasture land. She thought the cavalcade a most wonderful spectacle, and witnessed several jumps with awe-stricken interest, while her grandmother talked, evidently from knowledge and experience, of such strange things as whippers-in, scent, checks, a run, the master, and so forth—delightful mysteries all. If little Libby-Ann had had any attention to spare from the scene, she might have observed that her mother was likewise an intensely pleased spectator, growing suddenly years younger in bright-eyed excitement. By and by, however, there came riding along with two or three other laggards an elderly gentleman, who looked towards the trio at the gate undecidedly for a moment as he passed, and then raised his hat. At this Mrs. Gavin seemed to recollect herself with startled dismay. Stopping short in the middle of a sentence, she grasped her

grandchild's hand and turned abruptly away from the gate, summoning her daughter with a peremptory glance of disapproval. Sorely grieved to go was, at least, the youngest Libby-Ann, who would gladly have watched the last straggler out of sight, but her grandmother permitted no lingering or gazing back. The poor woman was in fact blaming herself for having surveyed without protest, and not wholly without pleasure, one of the sports which had helped to ruin her family. What inherited propensities might not the indiscretion have encouraged in her daughter and the child? With a view to counteracting such evil effects, she enlarged for the rest of that day on the sinfulness of squandering money on amusement and the misery of a pauper's lot. Listening silently, little Libby-Ann felt that something reprehensible had happened, and thought shudderingly of what had looked over the workhouse wall. Still, although she never again beheld the Dunmassey Harriers, their memory remained fresh and vivid in her retrospect of sombre days.

Long days they were as well as sombre, slowly building up the years of her teens. On summer afternoons especially you might often have thought that the sun had got stuck fast in his course, to the indefinite postponement of his setting. Extreme was the uneventfulness of life at No. 5 Main Street. Nobody ever came there, for the Libby-Anns were on the merest speaking terms with a very few

people, nor to these did they ever say anything more than "good morning" or "good evening," as the case might be. As the case was not, indeed, on little Libby-Ann's part, since one of those rare encounters so disconcerted her that she generally used the wrong phrase in her flurry. A little house-cleaning and sewing on the one hand, and a walk to Rathallen Church or to nowhere in particular on the other, exhausted their resources for work or play. Occasional newspapers, and some score of cobwebby old volumes, were neither here nor there, as it must be owned that small taste for literature prevailed among the Libby-Anns. Nobody could doubt that there was much monotony in their lives; but perhaps nobody could calculate exactly what share of the resulting tedium fell respectively to each of them—to the Libby-Ann who was growing into an old, or a middle-aged, or a young woman. Probably the largest portion fell to the most youthful, for whom even the commonest experiences had scarcely yet been worn into the smoothness which helps lack-lustre hours to slip glibly by. From a summer's beginning to its end was a very long look out for her; whereas her grandmother felt that "the cold weather would be back again before they knew it had gone." Yet, to set against this, little Libby-Ann was by nature more placid and acquiescent than her mother, who, despite eighteen years' seniority, would now and again betray signs of imperfect submission to ruling circumstances,

and would rebel to the extent of starting off on a solitary ramble into the country, whence she would return after three or four hours, tired and soothed. That, however, occurred but seldom, for Mrs. Gavin strongly disfavoured such a proceeding, as it upset her frugal arrangements, and led to the making of fresh tea at irregular times. She held, moreover, strict Oriental views about the behaviour appropriate to a widow, not countenancing what she called "stravades." In short, life for the Libby-Anns had got into a deep groove, whence it seemed by no means likely ever to emerge. Nevertheless, when the granddaughter's twentieth birthday was approaching, there came a jolt which jerked the wheel of the household out of this rut into unsurmised and wonderful ways. The whole thing happened within so brief a space of time, between a Midsummer and a Michaelmas, that, looking back, it appeared to have come upon them quite suddenly, all at once. But in reality it had, like everything, a beginning, and, like many things, one that did not betoken any important consequences.

II

Mrs. Whelan and her daughter were out in the plot at the back of their house not far from sunset on almost the longest day of the year. Its length had driven them forth to garden a bit, an expedient to which they resorted fitfully with small success,

for in the rubbishy soil of the meagre strip nothing would blossom at all except a few marigolds and wallflowers, half smothered by rampant weeds. On this evening the two Libby-Anns were chiefly concerned about a clump of hart's-tongue fern lately brought home by Mrs. Whelan from a walk, and not yet quite dead in its dreary new quarters under the wall. They had drenched it with a treacle-potful of water from the pump, when there was a knock at the door close by, and Mrs. Whelan drew back the bolt, expecting to see Matty Doyle with her vegetable basket.

But instead of one old pedlar woman there were two young men in grey tweed suits and caps. The shorter of these strangers had with him a three-legged thing, which the Libby-Anns supposed to be some sort of photographic apparatus, and they continued so to suppose after he had told them it was a spirit-level, for the statement conveyed no other idea to their minds. He went on to request that as he and his friend were engaged on a little bit of surveying, they might be allowed into the garden for a few minutes to do something completely incomprehensible with their instrument, whereupon having obtained a monosyllabic permission, they entered, made sundry mysterious measurements with chains and tapes, offered one or two remarks about the weather, which elicited the curtest possible response, and straightway departed. Startling and memorable, of course, the incident seemed thus to

be closed, though Mrs. Gavin did say gloomily, "Take care that they're not after taking the two of you."

On the following afternoon, however, the two young men reappeared, at the front door this time, inquiring about a small pocket-book, which they thought they might have dropped in the garden. They were admitted to search for it, vainly, and then a drizzle beginning, one of them, who had a roll of stiff paper under his arm, asked leave to jot down a few notes under shelter, as he could not open his maps in the rain. He was a rather short and slight, dark-haired young fellow, with an alert and intelligent expression ; his taller companion was fair-haired, and as fair-complexioned as sun and wind would permit. Upstairs in the shabby, dimly lit parlour their presence was an unwonted, indeed wellnigh an unprecedented sight. Never had little Libby-Ann beheld a fourth person there, and her elders had not done so since the time of her mother's brief married life. The room seemed crowded, and speech out of place, as if one were in church. Mrs. Gavin was somewhat less tongue-tied, and waxed positively fluent when the surveyor observing her to be in difficulties with the parlour door-handle, which had fallen off, came to her assistance, and pointed out that a couple of screws would mend it easily. He added that he had some just the right size at home, and could bring them over to-morrow, if he might. It was a very long while since she

had been proffered any neighbourly help, and she accepted this with alacrity. In the course of their conversation it appeared that he was John Dowdall, in the employment of a large mechanical engineering firm at Belfast, but staying now with his people over beyond Knockrush, for change of air after an illness. He was taking advantage of his leave, he said, to make up another branch of his profession a bit. This she heard with approbation, remembering that in the old days the Dowdalls of Knockrush were always considered a highly respectable family. His friend was Terence Cassidy of Rahilleen ; and at this name her round face—all the Libby-Anns inclined to plumpness—lengthened a little below her limp black cap. For in past troublous times those Cassidys had been all, more or less, sporting people, and however decent a lad this one might seem, the fact turned an eye of suspicion upon him.

But neither of her new acquaintances was aware of it, and next day when John Dowdall arrived bringing the screws, with him came Terence Cassidy. Furthermore, *he* had brought a bundle of small herbaceous plants, wherewith to replace the languishing fern ; so that its owner was called upon to superintend his operations out in the weedy plot, while John Dowdall repaired the door-handle, watched admiringly by her mother and her daughter. It was just as well perhaps that the party had been thus divided, since Terence Cassidy's

talk ran much on the prospects of his greyhound Silver Streak at the next coursing match, a subject, in truth, far more congenial to him than the culture of stocks and asters and pansies. "They look very much alike just now," he said apologetically, "but, I believe, they are really different patterns." Still he did make, by means of the coal-shovel, a wonderfully rapid clearance among the overtopping nettles, and got all the little green plants stuck down neatly in a row before it began to rain. For this afternoon, too, was showery, coming on to pour with such persistence that the Libby-Anns' visitors were weatherbound in the parlour for a long time, which somehow seemed short, until Mrs. Gavin, realizing how late it had grown, slipped downstairs and made tea enough for everybody in the largest-sized brown earthenware teapot: a height of hospitality at which little Libby-Ann and her mother exchanged glances of pleased surprise.

Thereafter the visits of John Dowdall and Terence Cassidy quickly became an established custom at No. 5. Few were the days—and long and dull—when their bicycles might not be seen leaning against the wall by the door. At first they used to have some special reason for coming—some small mechanical job to do about the house, or some promised geranium or magazine to ride over with; but presently they fell into the habit of coming for nothing in particular, and at length it seemed only

natural that they should account for their non-appearance if they had failed to arrive. To the old house's inmates it was as if an entrance had suddenly opened from another world, and that one much more stirring than their own, busier and brighter. Light and colour gleamed through to them in charming variety, though the weather was broken, and the lingering rays of those early-summer sunsets were often blurred with rainy mists. For as often the dingy parlour was filled with sounds of talk and laughter so unusual that the mice, amazed and alarmed, retreated into the remotest corners behind the wainscot. On fine days the same voices might be heard in the garden, and there the weeds, which had no refuge, yielded to fresh and vigorous assaults. Gardening had gained vastly in interest. Before long the plot began to look neat, and even gay with a glint of blossom here and there.

A somewhat analogous change was noticeable in the aspect of the Libby-Anns. All three of them, now that callers were possible, probable, certain, paid more attention to their toilet, relaxing the sumptuary laws which had reserved the less threadbare garments in their ill-plenished wardrobe for use on state occasions. This was most perceptible in little Libby-Ann, who not only twisted her soft brown tresses into fashionable shapes, but boldly took into constant wear a lilac silk scarf that had never seen the light of common days. It did not

harmonize very well with her grey cotton blouse, but it gave her a reassuring sense of correct costume. She no doubt felt the revolution more keenly on the whole than her elders, being "surprised withal," and ready at first sight with her "O brave new world!" Even John Dowdall's discourse about the machinery which greatly occupied his mind never palled upon her, though her mother and grandmother sometimes grew rather weary of it. Happily would she sit studying the pages he displayed illustrating his especial hobby—turbines ; and if she could not always follow his disquisitions upon their structure and uses, she did sincerely admire the huge convoluted screws, which had often such prettily shaped heads, she thought, strangely like the blossom of some wild flowers she had seen in the fields. Meanwhile, if Terence Cassidy were inclined to wax unduly horsey and doggy in his conversation, her mother would get him out of doors to do a bit of gardening, lest haply he should fall into disfavour with the mistress of the house. Not that Mrs. Gavin's mood was at this time pessimistic or censorious. As she looked on, a conviction had come to her that there was courtship in the air, an idea which pleased her well. Libby-Ann and she would live lonely enough without the child, she said to herself, but all the same they might be thankful to see her settled in any comfortable way before they went, for they would leave her terribly poorly off. Once or twice she

said something of this to her daughter, who made little response. Had Mrs. Whelan spoken her thoughts aloud, it would have appeared that she was wondering how her mother could talk so absurdly, really as if there were not more than thirty years' difference between their ages.

But, quite beyond the scope of Mrs. Gavin's prevision, there had taken place an event which she would have considered far more important than her granddaughter's matrimonial prospects, however splendid. For Edward Gavin, her only son, whom she remembered every day of her life as a small child, had started on his way homewards from Philadelphia, with the intention of seeking her out.

III

Edward Gavin, having acquired a large fortune away in Pennsylvania, and never having taken a wife wherewith to share it, felt as fifty neared that his life was lonely and objectless. Thereupon he fell to wondering how many of his Irish relations might still inhabit the old country, which he had left as a young lad; and he soon determined to solve the doubt by coming over to see for himself. Sailing just about the date of the Libby-Anns' first acquaintance with John Dowdall and Terence Cassidy, he reached Dublin shortly after the friends' establishment as regular visitors at No. 5. To trace his family thither was a somewhat complicated

task, but the ample resources which he commanded so expedited matters that one July morning he found himself walking up the main street of Lisnagort. He came unannounced to the household about which he knew nothing for certain except that it included his mother, whom he had not seen for more than forty years. Of course he expected to find her grown old ; and since his arrival in Ireland he had feared that she was in poor circumstances, facts having turned up incompatible with his previous belief on the subject. A warning with the same purport he now received from another source ; for when he asked his way of a passing carter, the man replied, " Is it No. 5, sir ? Sure that's the Libby-Anns' ould house, there forenent Nolan, the undertaker's. Aye bedad, Gavins they may be a rightly spakin', but the Libby-Anns is the name they go by. Quare little ould bodies the three of them are, I hear tell. I don't mind seein' e'er a one of them about the place meself all the times I'm in it."

Notwithstanding this, Edward Gavin felt a shock at the poverty-stricken interior disclosed when the door was opened by a dishevelled middle-aged woman, in whom he did not surmise the younger sister he had never beheld. She was flushed and grimy, and attired in her least presentable skirt, as she had devoted that forenoon to scrubbing out the kitchen, knowing John Dowdall and Terence Cassidy to be away at Ballyrowan horse-fair.

Mrs. Gavin, whom he discovered upstairs, knitting quietly with her best cap on, was in so much better trim that he had some grounds for declaring her to look hardly a day older than her daughter. Yet his little niece, surveying him shyly in large-eyed astonishment, was liker the youthful mother he remembered than any of the trio.

Some not unreasonable misgivings that he had entertained about his reception after this long period of neglect proved quite unnecessary. Pride and delight were the sentiments with which his mother hailed his return, and while the fact that he was bald, stout, and stumpy did not prevent her from considering him the finest figure of a man in Ireland, she saw nothing in his past conduct to shake her conviction that nobody need wish for a kinder and more dutiful son. "Some folk she could name had done their best, she well knew, to set him against her and his poor father—that was the whole of it." Her penuriousness had sprung from anxiety rather than avarice, and his avowed intention to pay off, as far as was now possible, his father's debts, seemed to her the most important consequence of his wealth, relieving her mind of an old and galling burden. It was a simple result, too, which she could grasp immediately. With respect to the more complex details all the Libby-Anns' minds were in the plight of some spongy-textured marine creatures, left so long stranded high and dry that they had become incapable of readily absorbing

water : they must float awhile before it can soak in. Their arid domestic experiences had made the three slow to take in a notion so novel as the power of purchasing without stint. But they did begin to realize their sudden affluence, when on the morrow Edward Gavin, who was setting off for Dublin again, handed over to his mother a bewilderingly large sum of money with a request that it should be at once spent on fixing things up a bit, just till he had got their affairs straightened out. Then they would, of course, move into other quarters, but meanwhile they had better make the house as comfortable as they could—less like a rubbish-heap stuck in a mould, he almost said. Let them hire a couple of helps, and see about getting in furniture and so forth right away.

Left to carry out these magnificent instructions, the Libby-Anns felt that their world was indeed transformed. Instead of scrupulously doling out careful pennies, they might now buy splendidly whatever they chose, as soon as they could make up their minds where to start. Apparently they need stop nowhere. To that vast shopping they looked forward with a kind of delighted dread, which for the two younger of the three was in some degree tempered by anxiety concerning another interest. Suppose that all this business of furnishing and smartening themselves up should prove an obstacle to John Dowdall's and Terence Cassidy's visits ? What if they should imagine themselves in

the way, and leave off coming ? That mention, too, of a move from Lisnagort, perhaps far away quite out of the neighbourhood, had a menacing sound. Soon, however, it appeared that these evils were not coming to pass. The two young men fell in most cheerfully with the new state of affairs at No. 5, and gave very effectual aid. They could in fact turn their hands to everything. In spreading carpets, and hanging curtains, and shifting cumbrous furniture, their assistance was invaluable, and more energetic by far than that of the hired servant-girls. John Dowdall frescoed the parlour walls ; Terence Cassidy planted a small grove of ornamental shrubs in the garden. During those long July days the old house was pervaded by a thoroughly enjoyable bustle, and its "places mould-encrusted" cast off their doleful aspect.

Now all these works were from time to time surveyed by Edward Gavin, who ran up and down in the cars between Dublin and Lisnagort, making wonderfully little of the journey. Naturally he did not fail to observe the zealous part taken by the two friends, and to account for it on a plausible theory of his own framing, which convinced him the more because he had a certain incongruous leaning towards romance. In a very short time his conjecture became a firm belief that both these young fellows were courting his niece. When discussing future plans with his mother, he always assumed that little Libby-Ann would presently be

married, and leave the three of them to set up house together. He included his sister among what he called "the three old folks" as a matter of course, for though in these days relieved from domestic drudgery, and embellished by seemly attire and a light heart, she had grown many years younger than she had been at their first meeting, that early impression still held the field. It helped him to evolve further views about the situation. Before many weeks went by he had fully persuaded himself not only that his niece was in love with the good-looking youth Terence Cassidy, but that her mother, favouring the suit of the steadier though less attractive John Dowdall, often threw impediments in the lovers' way, carrying Terence off to work with her in the garden, and leaving her daughter to the society of his rival.

He was confirmed in this opinion by the result of some inquiries which he made into the antecedents of both these possible nephews. About John Dowdall he learned nothing that was not highly creditable and satisfactory. Employers extolled his ability, diligence, and certainty of getting on ; old family friends vouched for his exemplary character and amiable disposition, adding that he came of a good stock. Terence Cassidy, on the contrary, there were few to praise, though little was alleged against him except his fondness for hunting and racing rather than for any more profitable pursuits, and the likelihood that he would

“leave less than nothing behind him, as his poor father did before him.” From these particulars Edward Gavin inferred that Terence was quite sure to be his niece’s choice. What chance, he argued, could cleverness, industry, and thrift have when opposed to good looks, poverty, extravagance, and the natural perversity of a girl? Prudence forbade him positively to applaud what sentiment would not permit him by any means wholly to condemn. But he did entirely disapprove of the methods he attributed to her mother, and he was determined on no account to associate himself with them. He was not going to act the wealthy old curmudgeon of an uncle, come home with his money-bags to roughen the course of true love. Such a part would not suit him at all.

One August afternoon, when he had been considering these matters most of the way down from Dublin, he arrived at No. 5, where he found the youngest Libby-Ann alone in the parlour. It struck him that she looked rather disappointed, which was really the case, and he ascribed this, also rightly in a measure, to the fact that she had expected to see somebody else. So he was glad to give her news which he thought certain to be pleasant.

“Well, my dear,” he said, “you’ve got no visitors to-day, but you won’t be so very long, for I met young Cassidy outside there just now, and he said he’d be round here in about half an hour.”

Her reply was murmured indistinctly enough to

have been almost anything, even something so highly improbable as "Bother Terence Cassidy!" But her uncle did not thus interpret it, and continued encouragingly, "He's a fine, manly young fellow, and looks uncommonly well on a horse, I'll say that for him, though perhaps he's a trifle too much taken up with things of the sort. He might be the better, too, for some of his friend Dowdall's brains, and it's certainly time that he set about doing something for himself."

"I should think it was," said his niece. "Why, he's as old as the hills."

"*Old?*?" said Edward Gavin.

"He's more than three years older than John Dowdall really, though most people think he's younger, goodness knows why," she said, with a touch of resentment in her tone, "John's not thirty yet."

"He'll mend of that, my dear, fast enough," said her uncle, "and he's a very worthy young man too, Dowdall, in his own way; not but what he seems a bit long-winded now and then, when he gets on the subject of machinery; and I dare say he wouldn't be as good a hand as the other at a run across country."

"He can talk about something besides dogs and horses, at any rate," Miss Libby-Ann said, with biting emphasis; "and if he isn't quite such a big, heavy lump of a man as Terence Cassidy, I'm sure he's six times better-looking."

"Oh—hum—so that's the way the land lies," her uncle said, a new light slowly breaking through the haze of his preconceptions. He was silent for a minute, while his niece stared out of the window, tapping impatiently on the toneless pane. "Then I should say," he resumed, slightly discomfited, "it would be as well to give young Cassidy a hint that might put him off coming round here so often."

"Why on earth?" she exclaimed, looking aghast at him over her shoulder. "Why in the world, Uncle Edward?"

"You see," he said, "it's clear that the young man doesn't know your opinion on the matter, and if he did he might choose to act differently."

"*My* opinion's nothing to *him*," she said, "and—and yesterday I as good as promised John Dowdall that I'd make up my mind by the next time he came. He was to have been soon after three o'clock, but I believe it's more than a quarter-past now."

"That's only all the more reason," her uncle said, "why you shouldn't keep this young Cassidy dangling after you any longer."

"But I tell you he isn't," she replied.

"Then," persisted her uncle incredulously, "who, might I ask, is he dangling after?"

A step sounded outside, and little Libby-Ann suddenly made for the door. As she scurried past him she said something like, "Here she is—you can ask herself."

It was his sister who entered the room, and to her

he immediately began with : "That girl of yours has taken me by surprise. I find that it's John Dowdall she has a liking for. I always fancied it was the other young chap."

"*Terence?*" said his sister. "My dear Edward, what can possibly have put such an extraordinary notion into your head? The child would never think of him any more than he would of her. She's years and years too young for him."

"So she declared just now," he said, still sceptical ; "but, as I was saying to her, what brings him here in that case?"

"I suppose there are other people in the world besides little Libby-Ann," his sister said, nervously fingering a quaintly flecked purple and yellow pansy which she had stuck in her belt. "Terence says himself it was seeing me gathering ferns in Carroll's Lane—"

"Great Scot!" interrupted her brother. "I know you've ten or a dozen years the advantage of me, Libby-Ann—but *that boy!*"

"When there's less than five years' difference between him and me, if that's what you call a boy," she protested, aggrieved and indignant. "His birthday's in January, and mine's not till March."

"And as far as I can judge they both by rights should be on the first of April," said her brother. But the happiness of this retort so amended his humour that he soon adopted a more conciliatory

tone, and the discussion ended in his undertaking to tell their mother how matters stood.

Mrs. Gavin received the news with more equanimity than he had expected. The marvellous return of her long-lost son had in truth wrapped her round with a serene contentment, not to be easily perturbed. It was he rather than she who needed encouragement and consolation, as he began to fear that the companionship in quest of which he had come seemed likely after all to dwindle away out of his reach. "I'd been thinking," he said ruefully, "of taking some nice place down in the country, where we might do a bit of farming. But now that Libby-Ann's going off as well as the girl, I don't know how we're to manage."

"And what's to hinder us at all?" quoth his mother, eager and alert as a blackbird alighting with an eye on scattered crumbs. "Here am I a couple of years on the right side of seventy yet, and my mother lived to be over ninety, and my grandmother before her. Sure I'm as well able to look after things as ever I was in my life, Ned my lad; and I declare now I'd love to be in and out of a dairy the way I used in the old days. 'Twould do my heart good to be making up a pound of butter again."

"More power to you then, mother," Edward said, brightening up. "Please goodness you'll make up tons of it before we're finished. There won't

be a better bit of land with a finer herd of short-horns on it in this country than we'll have, the two of us."

As nothing intervened to delay these plans, which dollars in abundance made easy, they were promptly carried out to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. A double wedding took place at Michaelmas, and before the harvest was over the Libby-Anns had gone on their several ways: one to a farmstead in the Golden Vale of the county Tipperary; one across seas to a horse-ranch out in the Argentine; and one to the clangorous neighbourhood of a big marine-engine factory at Belfast. For in a happy hour they had looked their last upon their dismal old house in Main Street, and had ceased any longer to exist as the Libby-Anns of No. 5, save only in the fading memories of Lisnagort.

FOR LUCK

FOR LUCK

IT was after a visit to her mother's sister at Ballyroden that Lizzie Dowdall "took up with notions," so her future mother-in-law declared, and certainly until then Lizzie had always seemed reasonable and contented. Indeed, she might have been described as more than contented when a match was made up between her and Johnny Byrne, the Clonskeen blacksmith. For Johnny came of a highly respectable family, and was steady and well-to-do, besides being generally considered one of the finest young men in the parish. Lizzie was not only pleased with her lot, but proud of it in all its details, from the length of time that the Byrnes had kept the forge at Clonskeen, to the fact that Johnny could lift the heavy anvil by the nose with one hand, a feat of strength which none of his contemporaries could perform. But then she went to stay at Ballyroden, and there she learned to look at things from a different point of view.

Her aunt Mrs. Reilly was a station-master's widow, who had two sons in the post office, and one daughter in a telegraph office, and another engaged to a clerk in a pawnbroker's office ; and

Lizzie very soon discovered that the whole household regarded any sort of employment which had no office attached to it as a comparatively low and despicable calling. She was quick to perceive that they thought poorly of her prospects, and that they carefully spoke of her to their acquaintances as going to marry some one "in business." With much mortification she subsequently considered how great their disgust must have been when a day or so after her arrival she had complacently referred, in the presence of a visitor, to the number of horses that Johnny Byrne had shod last week. By the time that her fortnight with the Reillys was over she would have been as likely to mention the number of pockets he had picked. For she had accepted their opinions as those of people far more refined and fashionable than herself.

"But you told me you wouldn't be livin' too convenient to them odious hammers and horses," her cousin Fanny once said to her consolingly, seeing her altogether out of conceit with her fortunes, "and that's lucky anyway." And Lizzie did find a crumb of comfort in the fact that Johnny's house was just out of sight of the forge, though she had formerly regretted this as rather a drawback. So it is no wonder that she was pronounced to have "took up with notions," upon her return to Clonskeen. It is true that many, perhaps most, of these notions speedily faded away in the atmosphere of her native place; but it is

probable that they all left some trace on her mind, and one of them certainly had a marked effect on her future..

Johnny Byrne's cottage was in a row that bordered a lane at right angles to the forge. They were large, old, substantially built cottages, with deeply thatched roofs and porches, and dormer windows, and little front gardens, fenced and gated, all exactly alike. The Johnny Byrnes' dwelling possessed, however, and had long possessed, a distinguishing mark, in the shape of a gilt horseshoe fastened to the central spike of the iron gate. It had been there time out of almost everybody's mind—that is ever since the marriage of Johnny Byrne's grandparents. For just after that event Mrs. Byrne, the bride, had chanced to pick up on the road just by, a big, heavy cart-horse's shoe, and her young husband had stuck it over their gate "for luck." Years later, their son, a junior Johnny, had conceived the idea of embellishing it with a touch of gold paint, a custom which had thenceforward been kept up; and now the youngest Johnny had just given it, in honour of his approaching wedding, a fresh coat, so that it shone resplendent up and down the lane. All the Byrnes took a pride in it, regarding it as something between an heirloom, a trophy, and a talisman, and any mishap to it would have been deplored as presumably portending disaster to the family.

Therefore it was unfortunate that this should have been the very object against which Lizzie's new notions led her most firmly to set her face. It was one of the first things that she noticed upon her return to Clonskeen, and it immediately impressed her as an unnecessary, humiliating advertisement of a lamentable circumstance, which should be removed with the utmost promptitude. Accordingly the next time she was walking along the lane with Johnny she said to him, "I wish to goodness you'd take down that ould gilt gewgaw you have cocked up over your gate; I don't like the looks of it at all."

"Is it take down the horseshoe? Sure, what in the world 'ud bewitch me to do that," Johnny said, amazed.

"What's the sinse of havin' it there," said Lizzie. "It's no manner of use, and it has a very ugly, common appearance."

"I dunno what commonness there is attached to it," said Johnny, "when there isn't e'er another one on e'er another gate in the place."

"Everybody else has got more wit than to have the likes of it, I should suppose; and it's a nasty, unlucky old thing anyway," said Lizzie.

"Whethen now, that's the first ever I heard tell of a horseshoe bein' unlucky," said Johnny. "Sure 'twas for luck me poor grandfather put it up, and a quare thing 'twould be to take and do away wid it after that len'th of time. The rest of them 'ud all

think I was demented. And for the matter of it's bein' no use," he continued, bethinking him of more practical grounds, "it's handy enough to have somethin' special on our house, when there's other people of the same name livin' in the row. The horseshoe 'ud hinder anybody mistakin' us for the Joe Byrnes."

Johnny referred to the fact that next door but one dwelt a family of cousins. The head of the household, Joe Byrne, also worked at the forge, off and on; he being, however, not oversteady, it was less frequently on than off, and his wife and his sister and three or four children sometimes found it hard to get along. In short it was not a particularly prosperous or creditable branch of the clan.

"Sure *they* might keep a one on their gate if they pleased," Lizzie replied; "I don't see why we've any more call to be annoyin' ourselves wid it on ours."

"As if it was Joe owned the forge?" Johnny said in a scandalized tone. "Musha, bedad, I hope everybody'll be gettin' their healths finely till I do the likes of that."

His evident indignation caused Lizzie to drop the subject for that time, but she often recurred to it at other opportunities. Her abhorrence of the gilt horseshoe grew daily more intense, until it seemed to symbolize for her everything that she thought most disagreeable in her surroundings.

She never passed it without some disparaging remark, and on the eve of their wedding-day she said sarcastically to Johnny as they walked by the gate, that she supposed her father—he was a gardener—would presently be nailing an old spade and rake up above *his* door to make a show of himself.

The result of all this nagging was that Johnny in the end reluctantly determined to yield the point. Though the old horseshoe, with its many associations, was dear to him, Lizzie and peace were dearer. “She’ll never be contint while it’s there, whatever ails her, that’s certain,” he said to himself, and before breakfast on the morning of his wedding-day he said to his cousin Joe Byrne, “I dunno rightly why, but Lizzie Dowdall’s dissatisfied wid havin’ th’ould horseshoe up on our gate. Belike she thinks that strange people do be passin’ remarks on it goin’ by, and she’s timid, the crathur. So I’ll trouble you just to wrench it off the wire this evenin’, and put it away safe, in case she might be wishful to have it up agin some time. But, look here, Joe, don’t go for to meddle wid it till after me mother’s quit”—the elder Mrs. Byrne, a widow, was now living at a little distance with a married daughter—“because she mightn’t be best pleased to have it took away, and she mightn’t make herself overplisant if she was put out. Her temper’s a trifle quare of an odd while, poor woman.”

“I’ll make a job of it, no fear,” said Joe. “To

be sure you have a right to be humourin' both of them if you can. But it's much if your mother doesn't get word of it very prisently, and then there's apt to be ructions."

Joe did make a job of it, though not until the following morning, as there were too many healths to be drunk after the wedding to leave any leisure for other business. He brought the horseshoe back with him to his house, where the brilliance of the fresh gilding excited great admiration.

"Why wouldn't you fix it up on our own gate?" said his wife, "since themselves don't be wantin' it."

"Ah not at all I wouldn't," Joe replied, chiefly, however, from force of contradictious habit, for he was strongly inclined to adopt her suggestion. "'Tis pity of it to be done away wid," he said to himself, "and it a very ould, ancient emblem, so to speake. The row 'ud look lonesome like widout it." And before nightfall he did fasten it on top of his gate, which was battered and rusty, and had long needed a coat of paint.

So there the golden horseshoe was shining in that evening's sunset, when Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Byrne returned home from their little trip to Killarney. To Johnny it was an exceedingly bitter sight and he kept his temper with no small difficulty, especially when Lizzie said self-complacently, "Didn't I tell you that would be the best way of settlin' it?" It vexed him whenever he saw it, which was several

times every day of his life ; but he could do nothing ; since to demand back the horseshoe, or to protest against its use, seemed to be impossible, without causing more trouble than Johnny, who was good-natured and easy-going, cared to face. Even a very acrimonious scene with his mother could not move him to such a step.

These things had happened at Shrovetide, in February, and at the close of the summer that gilt horseshoe still glittered over Joe Byrne's gate. Lizzie had shown no signs of wishing to reclaim it, wherein lay Johnny's only hope of achieving its restoration. However, as this was one of his most serious grievances, he certainly did not appear to have much grounds for complaint. None of the bad luck with which his mother had threatened him, and which he had himself more than half apprehended, as a consequence of discarding the horseshoe, had so far befallen him. As for its present possessors, they seemed to fare neither better nor worse than before, their comfort varying according as Joe Byrne idled more or less, and visited Tierney's public-house more or less diligently.

One gloomy November evening, when grey dusk had begun to gather about Clonskeen, a stranger came walking up the station-hill into the middle of the village. He was a tall, thin old man, respectably clad, but with a woe-begone, broken-down air and mien. In his hand he carried a small black bag. Having made his way feebly and with difficulty up

the hill, he stood for a while at the corner of the Byrnes' row, and peered into the drizzly twilight mist that filled its little gardens. Presently his eye was caught by the gleam of the gilt horseshoe, and he set off towards it immediately, moving faster and faster the nearer he came to it, as if a magnet were tugging him along. Beneath it he passed through the gate, and did not pause till he stood panting in the Joe Byrnes' porch.

Joe Byrne himself was seated by the hearth, where he had spent most of the day, as want of means and want of energy debarred him from frequenting any livelier or busier scene. Hearing a step outside the door, he went to it, and opened it on a stranger, who could only gasp breathlessly something about "old John Byrne, the blacksmith."

"Is it ould John Byrne?" said Joe. "Whethen now, if it's either of the ould ones you're lookin' for, sir, you're a day after the fair, for the both of them's in their graves this good few years."

"My father and brother they were," the stranger said, leaning against the door-post. "Pat Byrne I am myself. I knew they were out of it. But there's a young one."

"Then it's me uncle, Pat Byrne, you are, that went to the States," said Joe. "Step inside, sir, and take a rest. You're lookin' quare and bad."

Having stepped in, the old man seemed quite incapable of further conversation, until he had

been revived by "a sup of spirits and a cup of tay." Even then he remained in evidently a very feeble state. He had caught a severe cold, he admitted, on the voyage from Boston, and was not fit to be going about. "But I'd set my mind," he said, "on finding my brother Johnny's son, if he's left e'er a one." Here Joe nudged into silence his sister Maggie, who seemingly was about to volunteer some information. "Johnny and I was always very friendly together," said the old man; "I never was great with Dan; and it's a son of Johnny's I'd wish——" He fingered the handle of his black bag, and did not finish the sentence.

Presently he resumed: "Over fifty year it is since I set foot last in this place, and it's altered considerably. But I knew where I was well enough when I saw the horseshoe over your gate. Only for that I wouldn't have been sure this was the right house, though I remembered 'twas here or hereabouts in the row. I had a notion it was a trifle nearer the forge end; but the horseshoe settled the matter. And so you're keeping the old forge yet?"

"Aye bedad," said Joe, "workin' away at it I am. It's there I'd be now, if it wasn't that business is a bit slack these times."

"You've parted, I'm thinking, with some of the things that there used to be in it in your poor father's time," Pat Byrne said, glancing round the dimly lighted room; "leastwise I get a strange sort of look on the place; barring the horseshoe;

that's as it was ever, and no mistake about it. But sure what matter? It won't be long before I'm in a place that's apt to look stranger by all accounts."

"Ah, why don't you offer the poor man a drop more of the spirits, Joe?" said his wife aside.

"Is it a Joe you are?" said his uncle. "I had a notion they'd be keeping to John Byrne at the forge. But no great matter for that either. I'm satisfied. So long as you're your father's son, one name's as good as another."

"Why, to be sure," assented Joe, feeling keenly alive to the fact that he was the son of a father whose Christian name had been Daniel.

"And now," said the old man, beginning to fumble at the lock of his bag, "I must trouble you to oblige me with a drop—no, ma'am, thank you kindly, not any more of the whisky—what I want is a drop of ink. Everything else I have ready to hand here. For I have it in my mind to be writing down my will before I set a foot further. There's no sense or reason in delaying after I've found you, Joe, and 'twould be a bad job to give anything time to hinder me of signing it, and have my bit of money divided into shavings, belike, among the mischief knows what people, instead of going in a lump to poor Johnny's lad, the way I intended, just for the want of a scratch of a pen."

The ink was quickly provided, a thick and shrunken sediment at the bottom of its dumpy penny bottle, and old Pat Bryne set about inscribing

his wishes on a small sheet of bluish paper. He wrote slowly and shakily, yet had soon done, for the document was very briefly and simply worded. It ran to the effect that he left everything he possessed to his nephew Joseph Byrne of Clonskeen. His newly discovered relations watched him with deep interest. Maggie noticed chiefly the tremulousness of his wasted hands, and said to herself, "God help the crathur ; he's to be pitied." Her brother observed the same fact, but drew the conclusion that "whatever it was wouldn't be very long coming to them." And his wife, closely scrutinizing the cloth and cut of the old man's coat, commented inwardly, "Them clothes is good and dear. He's apt to be middlin' well off anyway."

When he had finished, he said, "Now, all there's to do is to be signing it in the presence of witnesses, and I'd sooner they were somebody except yourselves."

"There's Peter Moran of Tubberglas comin' along on the car wid his daughter," said Joe. "They'd step in and put their names to it and welcome."

And thus the will was completed with every requisite formality.

The event proved that Joe and Mrs. Joe, at any rate, had been more than justified in the opinions they had formed, while it left Maggie's perhaps a matter of conjecture. For immediately after the accomplishment of his purpose old Pat Byrne

seemed to collapse as if some sustaining prop had been withdrawn, and he was seized with "a wake-ness" so alarming that Joe ran post-haste for priest and doctor, who could not arrive in time to be of much avail. Before midnight struck, Joe had come into his legacy. And the black bag, which held it nearly all, was found to contain no less than three hundred and seventy pounds.

While these things were happening in the row, Johnny Byrne was hammering away in the forge, where a big job had to be finished in a hurry, and was in his own mind blaming his cousin Joe as a lazy divil for not coming to his work. Little did he reck how far more profitably Joe had been employed that evening.

But the news speedily spread abroad, and, furthermore, every one very soon saw clearly how it had all come about. If there had been nothing else, the talk of Maggie Byrne, who was simple-minded and indiscreet, would have made it quite plain that the horseshoe over the gate had guided old Pat into the wrong house, and put his bequest into the wrong pockets. Yet though this might be beyond a doubt, there, on the other hand, was the will, as good in any court of law as if ten attorneys had had the drawing of it up. So there was no more to be said or done.

Strictly speaking, a great deal more was said. For many a long day the Johnny Byrnes were frequently spending in wistful imagination those

three hundred and seventy pounds. What most tantalized Johnny was the chance he would have had of acquiring the carpenter and wheelwright's business, from which Michael Kelly had just retired. Its annexation to the forge had long been the dream of his life ; and Lizzie, to whom Mrs. Michael was an object of admiring envy, fully shared the bitterness of his repining over its narrowly missed realization. Luckier Joe set himself up in a small public-house in Dublin, that being the line of business after which he had hankered. But, truth to say, it shortened his days, and shrunk the fortunes of his family.

Since the Joe Byrnes ungratefully left the gilt horseshoe behind them when they moved, Johnny took it down and brought it back to his own house. He had not the heart at that time, however, to replace it over his gate. "Sure where'd be the use ?" he said in a despondent mood. "I'm after lettin' me chance go by me, and ne'er another one's like to be comin' this way. Too late in the day it is for luck."

A COLD RECEPTION

A COLD RECEPTION

BRACKFASTING alone in a Dublin hotel, Stephen Maguire, lately back from India, studied his *Irish Chronicle* for occupation rather than for news, but happened upon a piece among the advertisements which announced the approaching sale by auction of that desirable family residence Carrickglas, near Fortarne, in the county Antrim. "So there's an end of the old place," he reflected, as he went on reading the grandiloquent description: "'The mansion is fully furnished, and in excellent repair.' Well, I've a lively recollection of being caught by the leg in one of the crevasses in the woodwork of the front stairs, and the dining-room ceiling was constantly coming down in plaster avalanches; but things may have been set to rights since my poor grandfather's time.

"'Ornamental water,' that must be the little pond at the bottom of the kitchen-garden; it was deepish, but you could nearly jump over it as well as I remember."

His memories of the place were clearly cut, for they dated from the holidays of schoolboyhood, which lay beyond more than two score years,

chiefly spent in Bengal ; and his experiences since his home-coming, if one should so call the return of an elderly bachelor with no near relations, and all his friends in another continent, had been dreary enough to give these early reminiscences a contrasting charm. Before he finished breakfast it occurred to him that he might spend a bit of his objectless Christmas-week in a farewell visit to those ancient haunts ; and on the next morning he carried out this idea.

He would hardly have done so had he foreseen how cold and troublesome a journey it would entail upon him. As he travelled haltingly by disjointed branch-lines through the black north country, keen blasts pursued him up and down unsheltered platforms, and nipping airs crept after him into draughty carriages. Nightfall found him at Forfarne, still a long six miles from Carrickglas, and long indeed they seemed on the morrow, when Pat Heffernan drove him over on a side-car slowly, explaining apologetically that he must "take the mare cautious, because she wasn't cocked, and the black frost made everything as slippery as the blade of a greasy knife." Stephen had no very cheering meditations on his way towards the empty setting of that bygone time into which he was thus reinserting himself. They consisted mainly of conjectures as to how many of the contemporaries whom he used to meet there were still in the land of the living ; for he had lost sight of them all

during his Indian civil-servitude. As he had seldom seen Carrickglas, except in summer-green, the December bareness of the trees helped to confuse his landmarks when he approached it, preventing him from distinguishing the several clumps of beeches and horse-chestnuts, and giving him an impression that after all he had imagined more than he remembered.

Drawn up at last before the rusty lodge-gates, he had to contemplate them for some time in a grim east wind while his driver unearthed Andy Behan, the caretaker ; and when the little old man did appear he accounted for his delay by the rheumatism in his feet, which made him "liefer than sevenpence-ha'penny to be keepin' them out of the heavy brogues." His swarthily furrowed countenance did not dissemble a strong prejudice against the stranger whose arrival had hindered this desirable consummation ; but when he learned that his visitor was one of the Family, his scowl somewhat relaxed, for entirely unsentimental reasons, which he proceeded to state : "Sure, then, in that case I've no call to be stumpin' over the house and grounds after you, but I'll just unlock the front door for you, and have done wid it. You're not apt belike to be meddlin' or makin' wid aught ; but at all evints nobody had a right to be blamin' me for lettin' in a one of the Family, free and aisy, if it was the greatest thief in Ireland. All's one, if me sister's son was in, I'd send him round along

to keep an eye on things. But where'd he be except out of the way when he was wantin' ?—it's the worth of him."

"It might save trouble if you gave me the key of the house here," Stephen suggested ; but this evidently did not suit old Andy's sense of responsibility and propriety, and he shuffled with grumbling, articulate and inarticulate, up the long, straight avenue. To questions he replied as if grudgingly, and of necessity, yet with some irrelevant redundancies. There had been nobody living in the house since his time ; that was going on for twenty years. He'd come caretaking after he quit out of his own little farm over beyant ; and only for outrageous bad saisons, and the rheumatics, and ne'er a grown son stopping in it to give him a hand, 'twas there he might be yet, in place of sitting on the side of the road waiting to be sold by auction. No, he couldn't tell who owned the property now. He'd seen a light-haired gentleman with a long beard coming a few times, but not this good while back. Very belike it was himself that died not so long ago.

About half-way Stephen stopped at a remembered gap between two laurels, which allowed a glimpse down into a small, wooded ravine. Water ran at the bottom, out of sight, but the gleam of a white boulder struck up sharply through the muffling shadows. "Ah, there's our Banshee's Stone," he said, with perhaps a touch of pride, and

perhaps not quite without a colder thrill, for certain experiences of Indian life had tended rather to encourage his Celtic leanings towards the uncanny.

"Aye, they do be romancin' that way hereabouts," said the old man ; "a more ignorant pack than the people in the village I never witnessed. There's nothin' too foolish for them. So they've got a little fairy-woman sittin' below there of an evenin', or streelin' along by the river, and keenin' for deaths comin' in the Family—that's their story. And by the same token, somethin' let a woeful cry in that very place a couple of nights ago ; I heard it meself. But, banshees, how are you ?"

"Then how do you account for it ?" said Stephen.

"Well, now, sir, the fact of the matter is I'm not a superstitious man. Let them show me a banshee till I ax her how she comes to know or care any more about one family's death than c'er another's, and I'll not go agin her. But, tellin' you the truth, accordin' to me own present belief, herself that does be rovin' about yonder, and lettin' the screeches, is just some lady there was in the Family in the ould days that done it no credit in her life-time—savin' your presence, sir, if you're anythin' to her—and the bad conscience keeps her strayin' around in this world ; so she might ready enough that way get the knowledge of any of her own people bein' in sickness or trouble, and might

very likely set up a keenin' over it. But I dunno what call a banshee has to be botherin' her head if all the Maguires in Ireland was lyin' dead in heaps to-morrow or next day. Howsome'er, there's no mistake about the screeches. It's the misconstruc-
tions people do be puttin' upon them that I objec'
to, sir, if you understand."

Having thus vindicated the rationalism of his views, Andy hobbled on in a rather better humour, which had undergone a relapse by the time that he had climbed the sweep of steps to the hall door. He unlocked it morosely, and handed the key to Stephen, bidding him give it a turn in the lock behind him on both sides. "If you delay any great while," he added gloomily, "you'll have a good chance of driving home in the middle of a fall of snow. It's lookin' powerful black and heavy in itself over to the north."

The chilly dusk of the hall into which he was shut solitary made Stephen feel that he would hardly be tempted to incur such a fate. As he trod the wide, empty floor, where carpets were rolled into cylinders, and chairs piled into pyramids, each resounding step strengthened a resolve to cut his inspection short, and after a glance into the shuttered drawing-room, he turned towards the library. It was clear in his recollection, having been his haven of refuge in bad weather, as well as his port of departure on many an eventful voyage. Before he unbarred a window the familiar

odour of musty leather assured him that his ancient companions were still to be found in the glass-doored book-cases, and he handled two or three of them with a mind divided between past pleasure and present distaste for their grimy cobweb covering. Then he noticed a volume lying out on the spindle-legged writing-table, whither he went to examine it, sitting down for that purpose in the arm-chair ready before the shabby rosewood desk, just where he had seen his poor old grandfather sitting scores of times. Perhaps the remembrance of this fact was occupying his thoughts more than the faded blue *Waverley*; at any rate, he felt the situation strange and sad. An impression that he was not really alone, but in the presence of something watching close at hand, began to get on his nerves; he even fancied flitting shadows and footsteps creaking about. So he said to himself that as all his favourite haunts had been out of doors, and as it was abominably cold, and threatening snow, he would take the rest of the house for granted, and just dodge about the grounds long enough to let the driver feed his horse. Thereupon he conscientiously reshuttered the window, although he could conveniently have stepped through it on to the lawn, and groped his way back to the hall door, which he locked behind him.

Doleful were the pleasure-grounds, waved over by wisps of withered grass and branches of straggling shrubs. Stephen hurried through them,

making for the kitchen-garden, whither, truth to say, he was led by the remembrance of nothing more pathetic than certain large amber gooseberries. But he had seen them hung in a glowing summer atmosphere, redolent of ripened fruit, and flowers, and herbs, honeyed and aromatic, blended into that rich fragrance which is peculiar to old-fashioned gardens. Now the deserted quadrangle lay before him bleak and barren, despoiled by the blighting season of even its weedy greenery. Skeleton bushes and skeleton thistles alike stood starkly grey or draped with trails of yellowish dead creepers ; from beneath a canopy of the livid black which one instinctively knows will crumble into whiteness, a north-east wind blew bitterly to meet him, swooping down over the southern wall, where peaches used to bask, warmed through, in the beams of golden September afternoons. It seemed to him several degrees colder still than the pleasure-grounds, and he began to hurry down the straight middle walk that he might regain the shelter of the shrubberies.

Half-way, however, something made him slacken his pace. A few yards in front of him a figure emerged from the tunnel-like mouth of a pleached alley, which met his path at right angles, turned in the same direction as himself, and moved slowly on ahead of him. This person was a tall, thin, elderly man with a long, light-coloured beard, wearing a black great-coat and soft felt hat. At

the first glimpse of his profile, "By Jove!" Stephen said to himself, "that's Uncle James or his——" Across the thought flashed a recollection of the caretaker's remark about a light-haired gentleman with a long beard who had lately died. "Some stupid mistake of the old fellow," Stephen pronounced it; yet it threw a slur of doubt upon the certainty of his recognition, and checked his impulse to hasten forward in pursuit of perhaps a total stranger. That possibility, of course, held him back irresolute, while the other, who was seemingly lost in thought, sauntered along, stooping and abstracted; but presently he appeared to become aware of Stephen's approach, audible on the hard walk, for glancing round, he abruptly quickened his steps, and plunged into a hedged path on the left hand, which, as Stephen knew, ended in a rustic arbour. This action decided Stephen against running any risk of obtruding himself upon one who, kinsman or no, evidently wished to avoid his company. He therefore walked warily past the by-path, sending down it a rapid glance, which showed him that the arbour was a ruin, and that the stranger's form had vanished from sight with what seemed rather surprising celerity.

At the further side of a wall-like yew hedge the garden merged again into a sort of pleasance, whose main feature was a small pond of artificial construction, with a terrace path on one bank and a fir-planted mound, uplifting a wooden seat, on the

other. Stephen found that he had been underestimating the size of this water-sheet, which was perhaps as much as fifty yards long, though scarcely more than twice the width of a capacious ditch. It was now frozen strongly, in proof of which two or three large lumps of stone lay on its surface, thrown there apparently to test its bearing powers. He had never seen it under this aspect, which failed to attract him as it would have done at the time of his last visit, and he proposed to walk briskly round it, and reach the front lawn by a little path he knew of, skirting the mound.

But when he had gone a short way he saw that tall, black-coated, long-bearded figure coming towards him from the opposite end of the pond, and again was struck by its resemblance to his Uncle James. He could not at all rationally have accounted for the extreme reluctance which he immediately felt at the prospect of the meeting face to face on that narrow path, and he was indeed entirely occupied in considering how to avoid it. Only two courses were open to him: either a retreat into the garden, or a short cut across the frozen pool, and the latter seemed the quickest and simplest expedient. So, setting foot upon the murky-looking ice, he took several steps over it successfully, then one that gave way suddenly and startlingly under him, and another that went plunging interminably into a benumbing abyss; after which his thoughts were superseded by his sensa-

tions, and finally even these grew vague in a universal seething roar.

Meanwhile, old Andy Behan, on his querulous way home, had been overtaken by his sister's son Thady Lynch, who thus related his day's adventures : " Pullin' cabbage we were this mornin', only the black frost come up on the win' and hindered us. Freezing mad it is this minit. I clouted a couple of stones on to the pond just now, and scarce a crack out of it. And down McNulty's lonin' I met wid Mr. Maguire of Lalorstown comin' over here again, so I showed him in the back way, and opened the side door for him. I was thinkin' maybe you could step up and lock it after him if meself didn't be passin' back before dark. Slippin' over to Pather Mack's, I am, for to fetch home Bessy's winkers."

" You done the action of a great fool, then, wid all due respec' to you," said his uncle.

" But what for wouldn't I be lettin' him in ? " Thady said meekly ; " and I couldn't so well be delayin' to stop while he might be in it."

" Amn't I just after lettin' in another strange gentleman at the front door, and lavin' him wid the key ? " said his uncle. " And won't the two of them be catchin' sight of one another trapesin' about promiscuous, and a caretaker ped to keep them out, or keep an eye on them, at all events. A fine notion they'll have of the way I'm mindin' me business. Thrown out on the side of the road

I suppose I'll be the next thing we hear, and me whistlin' jigs for me money, all by raison of your tomfoolery."

Long experience had taught Thady better than to argue or protest, and merely saying, "Sure, I'll just take a race back and look after them ; they mightn't stop any time to spake of," he set off with the show of prompt action which alone propitiates the fretful fiend of fussiness. Old Andy continued his homeward hobble half appeased. "It's the dacint weather for me to be out hoppin' and throttin'," he murmured, "and the air teemin' wid frost. If the avenue wasn't as dry as snuff, it's breakin' every bone in me body half a dozen times I'd be, slippin' about, before I got this far."

Thady, taking the shortest route back to the house, arrived in view of the pond at a critical moment. As he trotted down the straight path towards it he saw his Mr. Maguire in front of him, standing still, and away near the further end of it another figure, of whom he said to himself, "Aye, to be sure, that's me uncle's man." But the next moment he added, "Och, between us and harm ; about steppin' on the ice he is, that wouldn't bear a good-sized cat yet. There'll be some one dhrowned in the weeds. Keep off it, sir, for your life," he shouted with a howl, which the wind carried in the wrong direction, and which in any case would have come too late, for the stranger was already on that treacherous floor, whence he forth-

with vanished from view as abruptly as if a trap-door had opened beneath him.

Charging at full speed to the rescue, Thady observed with surprise and irritation that the other spectator, who was a couple of perches nearer the scene of the disaster, remained quite inactive during those precious moments, continuing to stand uselessly in the middle of the path. Indignation, indeed, so far got the better of Thady's good manners that Mr. Maguire presently found himself shoved unceremoniously aside, while a fleeting gruffness inquired, "Arrah, then, couldn't you lave blockin' the road, if you won't do e'er a hand's turn itself?"

Happily, Thady's timely exertions, supplemented, however, tardily by his kinsman's assistance, availed to extricate Stephen from his benumbing bath while he was still capable of becoming alive to the extreme misery of his plight, and of receiving congratulatory assurances that it had very nearly been far worse. It was before long bettered by his transference to the lodge, where a dry suit, a blazing turf fire, and a mug of hot punch made life seem a less dolorous possibility. The three of them had the hearth to themselves, as old Andy retired, filled with despairing rage, into the inner room upon hearing of the accident, which would result, he assumed, in his being bundled out of the place to starve and perish.

By the light of the flickering sods the two

cousins—Stephen and James Maguire—identified one another with as much satisfaction as could be expected in the circumstances, and after imparting much family history James reverted to that day's events for the purpose of making a sort of apology. “Upon my word,” he said, “it was a piece of good luck that the lad there”—he meant Thady, who was hanging Stephen's streaming garments on a chair-back at a little distance—“came up just when he did, for, to tell you the truth, I doubt that I'd have had the wit to do anything in time—I was so taken aback. You see, when I was prowling about a few minutes before, for a last sight of the old place, I happened to look in at the library window, and there you were—it must have been you, of course—sitting at the writing-table, just as our poor grandfather used to do, and so awfully like him, by Jove, it made me jump. I'd have sworn it was himself, if that had been possible. Really, it is a remarkable likeness.”

“I used to think he must be a hundred at least,” Stephen reflected, feeling twenty years older on the spot.

“Well, then,” James continued, “a bit afterwards, on my way towards the pond I looked up, and there was the same figure sailing over the water—which I'd no idea was frozen—and disappearing like a jack-in-the box. I declare, I don't know what I didn't imagine for the moment.”

“Nobody can be expected to rescue ghostly

apparitions ; I doubt that the Humane Society would award even a certificate in such a case," Stephen said, with somewhat disingenuous condescension, resolving that he would keep silence about the resemblance to James Maguire, senior, which had been the true cause of his own escapade.

The younger James soon afterwards departed, leaving Stephen to wait for the drying of his clothes ; and when this had been accomplished, he hastened to present Thady with what sovereigns their pockets chanced to contain, thinking them small enough guerdon for no inconsiderable risk of a muddy death, and the certainty of a most uncomfortable ducking. Thady protested strongly against any gift, yet eyed the coins with an involuntary wistfulness that enabled Stephen to persist in proffering them, successfully at last, for Thady carried them off into a corner behind the settle. A sound of chinking followed, and went on for some minutes. Then Thady emerged, with his shock of hay-coloured hair set on end as if rumpled by an abstruse calculation, which had puckered his sunburnt, blunt-featured visage into anxious wrinkles. He had in his hand one sovereign, some silver, and some pennies, and all these he spread out before Stephen on the ledge of the dresser. "It's one pound, seven, and ninepence I'm bringin' you back, sir," he said, frowning hard in his effort to keep a hold on his figures. "And I'm takin'

three pounds, twelve, and thruppence on you, sir, and thank you kindly."

"Nonsense, my good fellow; I've nothing more to do with that," Stephen said, puzzled, sweeping the row of coins towards Thady, who pushed them back again, saying firmly, "Sorra the bawbee more. You see, sir, it's about the little farm Himself inside there used to be on over at Drumcallagh. Lyin' empty it is this two year, and the agent tould me he'd let me uncle back on the holdin' if he ped up a couple of the gales of rint he was ownin' when he quit. And that comes to six pound, three, and eightpence. So I'm savin' up for it since last summer twelvemonth; but all I had put by up to now was two pound, eleven, and fi'pence. For I'm keepin' the one half of me wages towards seed-pitatis, and oats, and such-like, in case we come by the land; and last harvest there was next to no extry earnin' in it, everythin' done that bad. So every week I'm in dread to be hearin' the holdin's took on us, and an ind to our chances. But now I can be spakin' to the agent about it first thing to-morra, and then, when I'm sure of it, I'll tell Himself inside there. Leppin' out of his skin th'ould crathur'll be, not that he'd so far gratify me as to let on he was any ways plased. But, sure, I well know he'll niver have an aisy day in his life till he gits back there; to hear him talk you might suppose 'twas next door to the Land of Glory, and it just sittin' on the edge of a bog a matter of siven

miles along this road, and a show wid docks and nettles. Not but what he might do right well on it yit, for he's soople enough, only when the rheumatics gets at him, and he'd have meself to be lendin' him a hand. 'Tis the least I may do, bedad, considerin' he kep' me out of the workhouse, the time me poor mother left me no size at all, nigh twenty year back. Hard luck it was on him, the sons, every one of them, to be takin' off wid themselves as soon as they were grown lads. That's the raison he does be quare in his timper, thinkin' he got bad threatment, but now he's apt to be more continted like, and——”

Thady was interrupted here by the opening of a chink in the door of the inner room, and the poking out of a head, which said with sarcasm, “Fine jabberin’ you have in it, begorrah. If yourself’s not the clashbag could talk the hind leg off a dog, get me one.”

“ ‘Twas only the sound of the voices he would be hearin’; he couldn’t tell what we were sayin’,” Thady said, recovering from his consternation as the door closed again. “It’s little notion he has, or he might be a taste civiller. Oh, bedad, sir, you mustn’t ax me to be takin’ more money. I wouldn’t know what to be at wid it, and that’s a fac.”

Stephen saw that it was necessary to waive the point, at any rate for the present, and he thereupon took his leave, stepping out into a keen-edged

twilight air, which began to be full of little crumb-like flakes. As he was getting on the car, a wild, long cry came wailing from the direction of the wooded ravine. "Between us and harm," Thady said, and the driver rapidly crossed himself, but then made as if he had only been clapping his arms for warmth. "There's plenty of screech-owls in it," he said; to which Thady replied, "There is plenty," and at once went indoors. They had scarcely driven off when again the cry arose, louder and nearer than before. Pat, despite the slippery down-hill, whipped up his gingerly trotting horse. "We'd best git out of this," he said, "for fear of the snow."

Stephen Maguire, shivering in his rug, said to himself that he would not revisit Carrickglas.

A LONG HOLIDAY

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A LONG HOLIDAY

WHAT with one thing and another, it was many a year since Mrs. Gowran had been able to celebrate Lady Day further than by attending Mass over at Barnaclough. That was, indeed, further, in a way, than she could have wished, being a long tramp up and down hill on a hot morning—for I speak of Lady Day in Harvest. When this last mid-August festival approached, however, she found herself in a position to take a little outing ; and she planned a jaunt on the Dundougal mail-car to go and see her sister at Kilrane. She could pick up the car very handily at the cross-roads, half a mile down her lane ; the weather promised well ; and she looked forward to an enjoyable excursion.

So on the bright forenoon of the holiday, when fetching herself in a bucket of water from the fern-fringed wayside well, she was sadly put out by the sight of a donkey-cart just coming over the brow of the very steep hill, at whose foot her cabin stood. For her keen eyes at once descried that the cart contained her mother's cousin, old Rose Maginty, who must of course be coming to visit her. It was most vexatious. Mrs. Gowran's sentiments

towards Mrs. Maginty were generally such as people feel for a person whom external rather than internal circumstances has entitled to consideration. As head of the Maginty family, with savings the amount and destiny of which remained doubtful, this childless widow could not be disregarded by her kin ; but as a dull and rather self-absorbed old woman, her company was seldom desired for its own sake. On the present occasion it seemed to Mrs. Gowran quite an intolerable grievance. “The ould torment,” she groaned ; “what bewitched her to come travellin’ over here this day of the year, and this hour of the day ? Not a fut will I get away now ; and the childer’s sweeties got, and me sate on the car as good as bespoke. Och, the weary ould toad. I’ll have to be makin’ up the fire for her again.”

But the steepness of the long hill, which obliged Mrs. Maginty’s brown donkey to descend it with short, oblique steps, gave Mrs. Gowran time to do more than merely lament, and before the cart reached the bottom, she had bethought her how she might yet avert the frustration of her original plan. As the patterning hoofs drew near, out of her door she darted, and rushed to meet the newcomers with agitated joy. The gossoon who was leading the donkey stopped abruptly, somewhat taken aback by the vehemence of her onset.

“Ah, Cousin Rose, is it yourself ? Sure now, it’s the proud woman I am to behould you, and you

comin' just at the very minyit I was wishin' in me heart I might see a sight of somebody."

"And I hope you're gettin' your health, Brigid," Mrs. Maginty said rather primly, sitting up in her voluminous black cloak on the middle of the flat little cart. "Destroyed I am meself most whiles wid the wakeness in me back."

"Och, well enough I'd be," said Mrs. Gowran, "if I wasn't after near gettin' me death just now wid a fright. The way of it was, woman dear, a while ago, when I was feedin' me hins, up steps an ugly, black-lookin' tramp of a big man, axin' a bit of bread over the half-door, and off wid it he went, as I supposed. But maybe better than a quarter of an hour afterwards, I was lookin' out to the back, and what did I see except himself just crawlin' in behind one of them bushes up above there, and he wid a cruel long-bladed knife in his hand. It's the quare turn he gave me."

Mrs. Maginty, and Larry Rourke at her donkey's head, both gazed up in alarm at the furzy bank behind the cabin.

"Whisht—don't be lettin' on you notice him," Mrs. Gowran continued, "for *there he is yet*. I could show you the very bush he's hidin' himself under—but I won't: he'd be apt to see me pointin'. Waitin' his chance he is to slink in and murder and rob me; and wishin' I was all the while from the bottom of me heart that there might be some one passin' by first. Says he to me, and I givin' him

the bread : 'It's a lonesome road you're livin' on, ma'am,' says he, bedad did he. So what, unless villiny, would he have in his mind to be makin' that remark, let alone roostin' up above there the len'th of the mornin', and a knife on him fit to reap the heads off the parish ?'

"The Saints be good to us—what'll we do at all ?" said Mrs. Maginty, her black hood and white cap-frill framing a face one pucker of consternation.

"Just travel back wid yous the way ye came," Mrs. Gowran promptly replied, "and bid the polis at the barracks—or you might belike meet the patrol—be sendin' a couple of themselves over here to take a notorious robber and vagabone."

"I will so," said the old woman in a flurry of fright. "Turn the ass's head this instant, Larry, and be leppin' in beside me, Brigid : I will give you a hand."

"Is it leppin' in ?" said Mrs. Gowran. "And what 'ud become of me then, lavin' that miscreant wid nobody to hinder him of droppin' himself down on the house here, like a spider out of its web, and walkin' of wid all before him ?"

"Sure what matter, so long as he isn't stickin' his ojis knife in you," said Mrs. Maginty. "Have sense, woman. Git up, and don't be delayin' us."

"Sorra chance will I give him to be stickin' me. More betoken the weight of me'd break down your bit of a cart before we were half-ways up the hill,

and there you'd have to stop, knife or no. But the minyit you're quit, I'll slam the door to, and ne'er the pin's point of a crack will I open again till I see the constables outside. And you'll come back along wid them, ma'am, and take a cup of tay at all events?" The laws of hospitality compelled Mrs. Gowran to make this suggestion, while she rapidly rummaged her brain for the means of guarding against an acceptance. However, she was spared that trouble.

"Troth and bedad I will not," Mrs. Maginty vehemently declared. "Glad enough I'll be, in all conscience, to get me heels out of it safe. Glory be to God, it's not in the likes of such a desolit, lonesome place I'm livin', where a body might aisy be massacred every day of the week, and no more talk about it. I've the public opposite, and the blacksmith next door. It's a headstrong woman you are. But I'll lave word wid the polis, and they might be chance come in time to hinder him of slaughterin' anybody else. And there's me sister's two big sons just at the top of the hill," she added, artfully raising her voice, as Larry wheeled round the donkey's meekly reluctant head. "They'll be along wid you directly."

As her visitors trailed away, their would-not-be hostess ran indoors, and hurriedly prepared for her imperilled excursion. She put on her purple stuff skirt, with, despite the warmth, two or three woollen shawls, of various sizes, over her head and

shoulders, and she filled her basket with the children's sugarsticks, and a live chicken for their mother. Then she locked the door, hid the key, and sped off down the lane, as unwilling as any malefactor to be overtaken by the constabulary.

Mrs. Gowran reached the cross-roads much too soon for the mail-car, and she sat down for her long wait in the scanty noontide shadow of a hedge. At first she was too hot and breathless for reflection, but as she grew cooler, she naturally began to review the hurried events of the past hour. And at first, again, she was too well pleased with the immediate success of her stratagem to concern herself about either its justification or further consequences. But this self-satisfaction was short-lived. It drooped and dwindled from the moment when compunction visited her at the thought of that donkey-cart jolting back, without rest or refreshment, all the many miles to Clonroe. "A pity it is," she mused, "they to be trapesin' home that way, wid not so much as a sup of milk or a drink of water among them. And suppose she gives notice at the barracks, and the polis find ne'er a sowl in it up at our place, their notion might be that we was humbuggin' them, and remimberin' it agin us they're apt to be. Or you couldn't tell but they might happen to take up some poor dacint crathur that was intendin' no harm, be raison of me romancin' about robbers. 'Twould be a sort of judgment on me if a rale one come along this

identical day. The door'd niver stand, I well know, if a middlin' strongish man gave it a heft wid his shoulder. There's plenty of tramps, morebetoken, 'ud do that same, comin' by a house left empty, that wouldn't look crooked at it if they seen anybody about. Maybe 'twas no thing to go do. I wouldn't wonder if some of them was in our lane this mortal minyit."

The spectre she had thus called up was not lightly to be laid. She continued to dwell upon the picture, and to darken it with harrowing details. In imagination she beheld her abode invaded by a whole family of tinkers. Mr. Tinker ransacked the house for her savings ; his brats hunted and caught her fowl off the rafters ; his wife laid hands on her treasured thick winter shawl. These apprehensions at length became unendurable. It seemed to her that she had been hours waiting for the car. "My belief is th'ould concern's after breakin' down somewhere, and won't come a fut this day," she said. "I'll give the whole thing up, and be steppin' home before every stick I have to me name's stole and desthroyed. Aye, bedad, that's what I had a right to do."

Therewith she took up her heavy basket, and started resolutely the way she had come. Looking back presently down a straight stretch of road, she saw the mail-car trot across it. A bitter sight it was. Doleful likewise was the aspect of her little house, fireless and voiceless, gleaming white in the

sun. Her boys could not be expected home from their Killarney trip till nearly midnight, so that before her lay a waste of time without occupation or company.

“I wisht to goodness,” she lamented, “that I let poor Cousin Rose stop wid me. She’d be better than nobody to wet a cup of tay for: and the gossoon’d give his eyes for some of the childer’s sugarsticks that’s just goin’ to loss. And here’s me best young hen that scared in the basket she’ll be as wild as a hawk for the next week.” Variations on these bootless repinings seemed to be her only materials for filling up the blank hours, and before they were half finished, she would in her weariness of her own society not only have greeted with rapture her late rejected guests, but have almost welcomed the advent of a tinker’s family. “The len’th of twinty Lady Days it is,” she groaned. “The Lord forgive me for sayin’ so, but I’m glad there won’t be e’er another till this time twelvemonth anyway. I’ve had enough ould holidays to last me for one while. Sure now, things do be rael conthrary; very aisy it is to git your plenty of whatever you don’t want.”

ON HIS OWN CONFESSION

ON HIS OWN CONFESSION

PETER HEANEY lived with his brother and his sister-in-law on their small farm, where he often wished that he had a more peaceful abode. For peace and quiet, Peter's highest good, did but seldom abide beneath the same roof with Mrs. Dan Heaney. She was one of the Nagles of Kilmacleeve, and had brought her husband a fine fortune, a fact to which she constantly referred. As he had a masterful disposition, fostered by long headship of his family, this habit of hers did not promote concord, and the same remark applied to many of her other habits. But though Peter hated what he called "bargein' and allegatin'," he never thought seriously of seeking quarters where they might be less rife. This was partly because he hated still more the thought of quitting the home in which he had spent all his thirty years ; partly because there would have been difficulties about the settlement of his interest in the little holding, and chiefly, perhaps, because of his affection for "the childer." They were his nephews, Joe and Jimmy, aged six and four. Peter had attached himself to them from their earliest days,

and in stormy domestic scenes had frequently befriended and shielded them, especially Joe, who was a rather slow-witted, meek-spirited sort of person, well suited for a scapegoat when ruffled tempers required one. To leave them, therefore, was a step which Peter could not contemplate without some stronger incitement than the wranglings and ill-humours of his sister-in-law and brother.

“Och, botheration, they’re at it again, hammer and tongs,” he said to himself ruefully as he clumped down the ladder-like stairs one June morning, and heard a sound of voices alternately shrill and gruff ascending from the kitchen. At that moment Peter felt even more than usually disinclined for a fray, as a bad toothache had kept him awake until the small hours, so that want of sleep made his mood unenergetic and unenterprising. However, he reflected with some satisfaction that the belligerents would soon be taking their departure, since they both proposed to attend the fair at Manderstown, which obliged an early start. Consequently he foresaw a speedy end, or, at least, adjournment of this dispute, which apparently concerned the price to be put upon the white heifer; and he was not disappointed. For presently, to Mrs. Dan’s observation that “it was a poor case to see a man going about as headstrong as a mule and as contrary as a pig with his fields all the while full of her stock,” Dan rejoined that “if it wasn’t only for them, begorrah, his house wouldn’t be full

of her fool's talk either," and thereupon went out hastily into the yard, where he began to harness a more amenable mare.

Mrs. Dan, with a somewhat elaborate toilet yet to make, could, for lack of time, only vent her wrath by bestowing a few very peremptory injunctions upon the stay-at-homes. "And mind you, Joe," the last of them ran, "you'll sup sorrow with a spoon of grief when I get back if I find that you were after trapesin' about anywhere near them ojis, bottomless bog-holes, and takin' little Jimmy along, to be gettin' his drowndin' death, and nobody in the place with the sinse to hinder yous." As she spoke, the car on which she was seated went on with a jerk, and a spirit of windless calm seemed to begin brooding over the farmstead.

Peter was looking forward to a pleasant day alone with his small nephews. He had to finish mowing Gortbeg, a job which would keep him fairly hard at work till the crows came home; but he did not dislike that, as he was an expert mower, and took a pride in the practice of his accomplishment. As for the children, "the crathurs wouldn't be e'er an atom of trouble," he was sure, and he convoyed them out to the meadow without any difficulty, except what arose from the fact that Jimmy's old cap had somehow got mislaid, making it necessary for him to wear his new Sunday sailor hat, an arrangement which they devoutly hoped might not come to the knowledge of "herself."

In Gortbeg all went well for a couple of hours. Peter's scythe crept steadily on in sliding curves through the cool green and white stalks, while Joe and Jimmy drew the fallen grass to and fro in a rough little go-cart of his own construction with much zealous ado. But towards nine o'clock, when the midsummer sunshine had grown hot, the children bethought them of a milk can which stood beside a basket on the bank, and that reminded Peter of another can containing porter. Then, after they had all refreshed themselves, it seemed to him that it would be pleasant to sit for a while longer in the shrinking shadow of the high hedge, and this he proceeded to do. His mowing had made good progress, so that he could easily spare half an hour. He fully intended thus to limit his rest; but when a man who has been working vigorously reclines with his cap over his eyes on a comfortably-angled, mossy bank, and listens to a bee busy in a neighbouring foxglove, his views about the lapse of time are apt to become decidedly vague, particularly if he has spent a night woefully awake. As the minutes slipped past Peter thought less and less about resuming his task. By and by, also, he was visited by queer fancies, mostly, it so happened, concerning Andy Byrne's daughter Kate. Her face peered out at him between boughs high up in the elm tree. He was trying to row her to Mass along the road in a boat, with his scythe for an oar. He had mowed her a great bunch of

various coloured neck-ribbons, which he could not succeed in throwing to her across a wide stream against a strong wind. These fancies grew harder and harder to disentangle from facts, and then he recollect ed nothing more.

He was suddenly recalled to consciousness by a sound, the origin of which he did not immediately recognize. Sitting up with a start, he found that he was alone. Nothing could he see of Joe and Jimmy, whom, when he was last aware of their presence, broad slices of bread and treacle had happily occupied. That seemed to him only just now ; yet they were vanished out of sight. Not out of hearing, however, for in a moment he knew that the noise which had wakened him was the voice of Joe howling dismally, and at intervals breaking into frantic calls upon "Uncle Pather." Before he could move in its direction, Joe himself appeared round the corner in a desperate plight, for which his first words accounted all too sufficiently.

"Och, Uncle Pather," he panted and sobbed, "Jimmy's in the big houle."

At these tidings despair fell upon Peter, as well it might. Gortbeg is a small field, girdled about with tall, thick hawthorn hedges that quite shut out its surroundings. But at the west end there is a gap, and whoever passes it finds himself straight-way on the brown bogland, which spreads far and wide a dark expanse, flecked with green patches and low, furzy hillocks, and in places riddled with black

pits, where water lies deep. Through this gap the children had gone, and their adventures, to judge from Joe's incoherent narrative, had been as follows :—They had put up two rabbits, and had each pursued one in different directions. When Joe finally lost his, he discovered that he had also lost Jimmy, whom he had vainly sought for a long time among the broom and furze bushes. At last he had come to "the big houle," and there, floating on the water far below, was Jimmy's new straw hat. Joe, having the wit to understand what a calamity that betokened, had thereupon made his way back to the field in direful grief and affright.

His uncle's consternation equalled his own as they rushed bogwards, tripping in the wisps of half-dried grass. "The big houle" was the worse reputed of all the many pitfalls which imperilled unwary walkers in that part of the bog. Report called it bottomless, and it was undoubtedly of great depth. A slippery grass bank sloping down to the brink of its smooth, perpendicular sides made it fatally easy of access, and fatally difficult to get or to be got out of alive ; and when Peter and Joe reached it there, sure enough, was little Jimmy's white hat gleaming at them like a baneful star from its gloomy depths. Jimmy himself was, of course, nowhere visible. How should he be, with untold fathoms of black bog-water above his head ?

Peter stood gazing down in dark despair. That such a cruel fate should have overtaken the

“innicint bit of a crathur” would, in any case, have been a piteous thing, and that his own negligence should have led to it made it seem quite unendurable. Therein lay materials for a lifelong remorse. But at the present moment another aspect of the matter obtruded itself upon him. He could not refrain from considering what bitter reproaches he would meet with for his share in the melancholy disaster. How could he face Dan and Cassie after letting their favourite child go to loss? The storm of anger and grief that he must encounter on their return was a terrible prospect to him; and some of its violence would, no doubt, fall upon poor Joe. This thought was, indeed, kept uppermost in his mind by Joe’s lamentations, the burden of which was—“Och, Jimmy, Jimmy, I couldn’t help it. Och, Uncle Pather, what’ll I do at all widout Jimmy? And kilt I’ll be when she comes home for drowndin’ him.”

“Whisht-a-whisht,” Peter said to the child, “sure ‘twas no fault of yours.”

Nevertheless, he was rapidly seeking expedients for avoiding the dreadful interview. Not being much of a schemer, only one plan, crude and simple enough, occurred to him, and that was just to run away. He must, of course, take Joe along. To leave him behind unprotected would be intolerable. Such a setting out into the wide world was forlorn and dismal to contemplate. Still, when Peter foresaw the car driving up to the door, and heard Mrs.

Dan calling, "Jimmy, come and see what I'm bringin' you, honey. I wonder, now, where at all Jimmy is," it seemed to him that anything would be better than telling Jimmy's mother where Jimmy was.

So the result of his hurried reflections was that he suddenly said to Joe, "I'm thinkin' we might maybe do well to quit out of this for a while till after they're home."

"Ah, do, then," said Joe, with a gleam of hope. "Let us go away this minit and niver come back agin."

"I must step into the house and fetch me trifle of money," said Peter. He had vague notions of tramping coastwards, and crossing over to Scotland, where he might find harvest work wherewith to maintain himself and Joe. Meanwhile his savings would be wanted for the journey. They amounted to something less than a couple of pounds.

In fear and trembling, uncle and nephew made their way back to the house, which seemed drearily lonesome and deserted, for Biddy Flynn, the servant, was taking a holiday. Peter hastily possessed himself of his wash-leather pouch, glancing round his little room at various other valued properties which he lacked the time and the heart to pack up—his best suit, his American clock, his framed portrait of Parnell—and then they started on their doleful travels, slinking along in silent dejection through the noontide sunshine.

About this time Mr. Fergus M' Nulty, J.P., of Cloncarrick, was driving himself in his gig to Manderstown fair. He had taken a short cut by a cart-track across the big bog, and in the course of it he came to where a very little, bare-headed boy was seated by the roadside, howling with disproportionate loudness. Good-natured Mr. M' Nulty stopped to inquire the cause of such distress, and learned from the child that he was after losing his new hat that the wind blew off on him, and that he was after losing his way looking for it, and that Joe was lost on him, too, and his daddy and mammy—laistwise they were gone off to the fair. The sufferer from all these losses had just sense enough to state, when questioned, that his daddy was Dan Heaney, whereupon Mr. M' Nulty said, "Is it Dan Heaney of Clonrush over yonder? Sure we'll find him at the town as easy as winking. Jump up here, me man, and as for the hat, there won't be much trouble getting you as good a one as the wind took off your head." Thus Jimmy, swung up into the high seat, was driven away, feeling a tremulous hope that he might not after all be permanently separated from every familiar face and scene.

As Peter Heaney trudged along the sunny lanes, the flurry of alarm with which he had set out gradually subsided. Now that he had actually turned his back on the farm, he could think more calmly of that tragical home-coming, from which he and his fellow-culprit would be safely divided by so

many miles. But he did not attain to any real peace of mind, for no sooner was he able to count upon his own absence than his conscience began to upbraid him about the step whereby he had secured it. He said to himself that if Dan and his wife arrived home and found everybody gone, without a word of explanation, "it would be apt to drive them distracted clane and clever." Peter's intention had been to send Dan a letter from their first halting-place, but the ill news would thus not reach the farm until the next day at soonest, and the suspense caused by its tardy flight would seem interminable to the inmates. When he had considered the subject for a mile or two further, he came to the conclusion that "it was no thing to go do. He had a right to be lavin' them word about it without delay. That was the laist he could do, and not have them runnin' wild over the country-side lookin' for himself and the childer."

Clearly as he saw this duty, however, its performance was beset with difficulties. To whom could he confide the message with a certainty that it would be promptly delivered? By this time he had passed beyond the small circle of his acquaintances, and the approach of sunset and Joe's limited walking powers forbade turning back in quest of a trustworthy bearer. It was true that they were drawing near the village where dwelt an outlying family of rather old friends, but this was less than nothing to Peter's purpose; for these friends were the Andy

Byrnes, and he somehow felt that to appear before Kate Byrne and her people with his deplorable and discreditable story would be an intense aggravation of his wretchedness. The only other alternative which presented itself to him was that he should report the disaster at the police barracks, whereupon the Constabulary would doubtless lose no time in repairing to the scene of it. Peter regarded the undertaking as a grave and perilous one. To set working powers about the scope of which his ideas were ignorantly vague was a risky thing. Then he was far from ready with his tongue, and a consciousness of deficiencies in that respect combined with his awe of all officials to make him apprehend that he would have much difficulty in expressing himself. Moreover, he had serious misgivings that his statement might lead to his detention by the police, and preclude his escape. Still, he could not avoid the venture without increasing his own self-reproach by torturing Jimmy's parents with prolonged uncertainty. That much was clear to him amid the turmoil of his greatly troubled meditations.

They were now coming in sight of the small, whitewashed barracks, up the front of which dark-green hops had been trained to creep in parallel straight lines, and which a hedge of scarlet fuchsia, clipped as smooth as a brick wall, separated from the road. On the road side of it, near the gate, Sergeant Hickey sat in a creaking wicker chair, and

wished that he had not finished reading his *Free-man's Journal* so long before tea-time. Just behind him, at the other side of the hedge, his wife was more agreeably occupied in exchanging gossip with a young neighbour who had called upon her. The sergeant alone was visible to Peter as he advanced through the late afternoon sunbeams, which dazzled his unhappy eyes. Peter was wearing his worst old working clothes ; he looked scared and bewildered ; his hair had been roughened by many distracted rumplings, and a tuft of it stood up through a hole in the front of his torn cap. Joe's face was quite singularly begrimed with dust and tears and treacle, and he had begun to limp sadly from overmuch walking.

When this tramp-like pair paused at the gate Sergeant Hickey looked up, not displeased at the diversion, though it promised nothing of great interest.

“ Beg pardon, sir,” said Peter, “ I was wishful to mention to you that I'm after takin' and drowndin' the little young fellow above at Dan Heaney's.”

The word “ drowndin' ” brought Sergeant Hickey to his feet with a jump. “ What was that, me man ? ” he exclaimed. “ Drowndin' ! Who's drownded, or after drowndin', anybody in my distric' ? ”

“ 'Twas the little young fellow,” Peter reiterated, “ in the bog-houle. The brother of him,” he said, pointing to Joe, who at this reference to their

affliction had again begun to cry. "Left along wid me he was, and I have him drownded on the crathurs—his father and mother—and they away at the fair ; so I want——"

"Hould your whisht," said the sergeant, fumbling for his note book. "Not another word out of your head till I warn you that anythin' you say may be used agin you as evidence. Now you're cautioned. What account have you to give of the affair ?"

But the sight of the note book had paralysed Peter's faculties, and he could only stare dumb-founded.

"Sure you can tell me your own name, anyway, and his name, for a beginnin'," said Sergeant Hickey, and Peter stammered them out, with a few particulars about ages and localities, which the sergeant took down, then resuming : "And what at all led you to commit the crime? Was it pre-meditating it you were, or had you any provocation ?"

"For the matter of provocation," said Peter, "there wasn't e'er a better child in Ireland than poor Jimmy, though he mightn't be altogether as biddable as Joe. The mother had him a trifle spoilt. I dunno what come over me. Ne'er a thought had I of doin' such a thing when I quitted me mowin', and the next I knew of him he was at the bottom of the big houle, barrin' his hat, that might as well go along wid him."

"Had you drink taken?" inquired the sergeant.

"No more than only an odd sup of porther out of the can," Peter said. "It might be chance go to me head, but I wouldn't think so."

"And you there, Joseph Heaney, did you see anybody—this man for instance—offering to drownd your brother Jimmy—James, I should say?" the sergeant demanded solemnly of Joe.

"I did not," Joe gasped. "Runnin' after a rabbit I was, and I niver seen aught but his hat. Och, she'll be fine and mad."

"So I was throublin' you to be lavin' word wid them up above to say where they'll get him," Peter said meekly, "or else they might niver rightly know what's took the child. Send them the news in a letter I will meself from where I'm goin', but letters does be quare."

"Is it sendin' letters you'll be?" the sergeant said grimly. "And where might you plase to suppose yourself's goin'? For let me tell you, it's before the magistrate, as straight as you can walk. A quare letter, troth and bedad."

"Beg pardon, sir," Peter said, with desperate firmness, "steppin' on we have to be, for it's late enough we are already. Come along wid you, Joe, out of that." He was moving on, but Sergeant Hickey planted himself awfully in the way, and: "Stop where you are," he commanded. "It's a likely story that you're to be steppin' about the countrry manslaughtherin', and makin' a brag of it

after that again. I dunno what we're here for if the likes of you are to be at large."

"Beg pardon," Peter said once more, attempting to push by, but feebly, for he was conscious that his scheme had collapsed.

"Then it's resistin' arrest you are," said the sergeant. "Turner—Joyce," he shouted, and two constables came bolting out of the barracks.

"What's he at all?" said one of them. "Drunk and disorderly, or a vagrant?"

"Vagrant in me hat, Joyce," said the sergeant. "Nothin' less it is than a case of man-slaughter."

"That's a bad job," said Turner. I suppose it's bringin' him before a magistrate you'll be?"

"There's no call for you to be supposin'. 'Tis the proper coorse to adopt," the sergeant replied, with dignity. "About takin' him I am, under escort, to the nearest Jaw Pay, and chargin' him, 'on his own confession,' wid the drowndin' of a child—belongin' to his brother, it seems, to make it better. Mr. M'Nulty's the most convanient magistrate, and we'd a right to not be delayin', for it's full late, if yous are to get back in time to go on patrol. I believe the prisoner has the wit to come quiet and dacint. Take a holt of the young shaver, Joyce, and we'll step along."

Peter did, in fact, accompany them very quietly. He seemed to himself to be moving all of a piece, as if he were hewn out of a block, so dazed he was

and daunted, so benumbed by a strangeness which his imagination failed to grasp and realize.

Now, as soon as these things had begun to happen, Mrs. Hickey and her young friend at the other side of the hedge had broken off their animated conversation, and had devoted themselves to listening with all their ears, keeping themselves discreetly hidden, lest they should be desired to withdraw ; and when prisoner and escort had departed, Mrs. Hickey was rather aggrieved because her visitor would not stay and talk over the event, but hurried off also, saying that she had an errand to do.

The sergeant's wife would have been not a little surprised had she known the object of that errand. Kate Byrne was making her way straight across the fields to the house of Mr. M'Nulty, Justice of the Peace. As she had a shorter distance to go, and went much faster than the regulation three miles an hour, she arrived some minutes before the Constabulary party, and luckily found the old gentleman at once. Pacing his little lawn in front of the red-brick villa, built on his retirement from business, he was contemplating its glazed porch, filled with scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolarias, which he regarded as the apple of his eye.

“ Well, Kate Byrne,” he said, when she trotted up, “ what's the best good news with you ? ” He had known her people all the days of his life, and would have been sincerely sorry to hear of anything amiss, even for talk's sake.

"If you plase, sir," said Kate, "I run over to let you know that Sarjint Hickey from the barracks is bringin' Dan Heaney's brother along to you, and is very apt to be tellin' you a pack of lies about him."

"The Heaneys of Clonrush?" said Mr. M'Nulty; "and what at all have the police to do with respectable people like them?"

"That ould new sarjint there is in it now," said Kate, "has no more sinse than a fat pig in a creel. But he consaits he's a great one entirely, and he's took the notion in his head that young Pather Heaney's after drowndin' one of Dan's childer a-purpose out on the bog; talkin' of manslaughter and all manner he is, and poor Pather, the best-nathured boy in the Kingdom of Connaught, that wouldn't be raisin' his hand to a fly. If anything happint the child at all, 'twas by accident you may depind. But very belike 'twas only his hat blew off into the bog-houle, for that's all they seen."

"And true for you, Kate," said Mr. M'Nulty. "This identical morning, driving to the fair, I found a little chap on the bog that had lost himself and his hat; one of the young Heaneys it was, and he said his people were at Manderstown, so I picked him up and left him with his mother on the green. A temper of her own she has, I rather fancy. But, sure enough, the others might easily think he'd got into one of those dangerous holes."

"That's the very way it was to be sartin," said Kate, "and poor Pather's in distraction over it

altogether, let alone bein' called slaughterers and murdherers and iverythin' else. So I thought I'd just run across and tell you, sir. They're comin' round be the road, and they might be here directly."

"We'll step down to the entrance gate and meet them," said Mr. M'Nulty. "We won't be long getting at the fact of the matter."

Accordingly Peter, as he gazed with blank despair at Mr. M'Nulty's gaily painted railings found the black clouds melting marvellously out of his sky, while the sergeant saw all prospect of a sensational case vanish away no less swiftly.

"Well, now, my lad," Mr. M'Nulty said to Peter at taking leave, "you should be very thankful to little Kate Byrne for speaking up for you. I doubt that you're any great hand at it yourself, and in my opinion you couldn't do better than ask her to give you a help with it for the rest of your life."

Kate, who was standing by, did not contradict him.

"And that was as good as meself biddin' you be axin' me," Kate said with some dissatisfaction to Peter a few days afterwards when they were discussing the incident.

"And, sure, what matter for that, asthore machree?" said Peter. "If I'd thought I had e'er a chance, it's axin' you I'd be from mornin' till night. Tormented I'd have you. But, bedad, it's little notion I had that you'd look the way I was. Cudn't I be axin' you now as often as you plase?"

"Ah, not at all," Kate said ; "that wouldn't put the beginnin' of it right ind foremost. But mightn't I bid you only for the sake of sayin', 'Troth and I will not'?"

Peter looked as if this suggestion had pointed him to a hitherto unsuspected abyss. "Well," he said, after a pause, with a gasp, "you didn't, anyhow, mavourneen, glory be to God, and the lucky win' that took the notion to blow off Jimmy's hat."

＼ A DINNER OF SALT LEAVES

A DINNER OF SALT LEAVES

BOB MISKERRY and Bridget Foyle, his wife, had words one wild March morning on Inver-tully strand. High words they were in one sense, as they had to be shouted lustily, by reason of a ruffling wind and the distance that separated the speakers ; but they were neither violent nor abusive. He was standing up in his queer-shaped, canvas-covered boat, which danced hoydenishly on the edge of the full tide as he baled her out with an old jam-pot, and his wife was calling to him from the nearest point of the shingly reef.

“Arrah, man, come along in wid yourself out of that. What foolery would you be at at all, wid the win’ risin’ up every minyit, and the say gettin’ as soft as anythin’ ? ”

“Och, to be sure, you never seen me goin’ fishin’ before ! ”

“Sorra the one you’ll get this day. Ould Tim Walsh was tellin’ me just now he and his sons are after trawlin’ about ever since it was light, and ne’er a sign of a fish there is in the bay. You might as well be diggin’ the shingle-stones for pitaties.”

“And what else will you be givin’ your sister for her dinner ? ”

“Is it poor Rosanne? ‘Twould be a quare thing if we couldn’t conthrive a bit one way or another.”

“‘Twould so. I was thinkin’ the very same; and divil an atom have you in the house fit to be offerin’ her if she was an ould crow out of the fields.”

“That’s an ontruth for you, and me after gatherin’ half a potful of the salt laves last night, the way we mightn’t be left short entirely, wid you bringin’ in nothin’.”

“Salt laves—preserve the whole of us!”

“There’s plenty as good as you has to put up wid naught better.”

“Better or worse, if there’s a fish in it at all, I’d be long sorry to have man, woman, or child come into my house after trampin’ over from beyant Kilduff, and an ould brash of stinkin’ sayweed at the end of it.”

“Amn’t I tellin’ you what Tim Walsh says? And for the matter of that, I well know me sisther’d as lief have one thing as another. She never was one that minded a pin’s point what she would be aitin’. So where’s the sinse of drowndin’ yourself for nothin’? Come in out of that.”

“What talk has anybody of drowndin’? Do you think ould Tim Walsh is after puttin’ the bay through a strainer, that he’s so sure there mightn’t be an odd pair of sole or a few plaice in it yet?”

“Now that I think of it, Rosanne wouldn’t touch e’er a bit of fish, if we had the house full. I

mind she couldn't abide so much as the smell of it. She——”

“Och, isn't it a wonder that you're not tired romancin' there? You'd be doin' some use if you run along and fetched in any sticks you could find to the fire, that's gettin' black.”

Mrs. Miskerry turned away in a huff, but repenting in a couple of steps, she jumped off the shingle-bank and scampered down among slippery-rimmed pools, still closer to the water's edge, where she resumed her argument. Bob was by this time getting out his oars.

“Look you here, Bob, lave clatterin' wid them ould consarns and listen to me. If you'll come ashore like a reasonable man, I'll slip round to thry can Mrs. Daly or any of them loan us a thrifle of male and a grain of tay for the dinner, agin Rosanne comes. They might by chance have it among them.”

“The devil receive the thranten a one of them crathurs has, I well know, suppose I was wishful you to be axin' them, and bedad I am not so.”

“Then I'll tell you what we had a right to do, if you're so set agin the salt laves. Just come along now, and the two of us'll start off walkin' on the Kilduff road. It's early yet, so we'll get to Kilduff all out, or very nearly, before we meet her, and we'll say 'twas to save her the long tramp over here we come to see her at her own place. So then she'll be apt to stop where she is, and no need for

us to be throublin' ourselves about the dinner. That's the best way we can conthrive."

But Bob said, "It's no way I ever heard tell of," a reply which immediately crushed all Bridget's hopes of carrying out her plan. She had not been his wife for some twelve months without learning that any line of conduct deemed by him contrary to custom would certainly rouse his strongest disapproval. Accordingly she relinquished it in a very ill humour, which was not bettered when a sliding wave surprised her with a sudden cold uprush around her ankles, making her plunge backwards hastily. From this increased distance she called with sarcasm, "Ah sure, have it your own way. Plase yourself, and you'll plase me. If it's gettin' your death you'd be foolin' after fishes, and ne'er a one in the bay, that's your own look-out. I've nothin' to say to it."

Having thus pointed a barb of remorse where-with to torment herself during his absence, she turned away up the beach, and tried by a quest for firewood to fend off the hardest pressure of her troubles. Invertully, with its handful of amphibious cabins scattered on the strand, lies perpetually under a cloud-shadow of penury. Failure of crops, failure of turf, failure of fishing, had followed one another in waves of want, each bearing off something from the scantily provided lives over which it swept. Therefore the lengthening daylight shone into eyes that deplored its over-

early return, and upon peaked-faced people searching among the rocks for seaweed and drift-wood, or scanning the rough water for a chance of putting out not altogether too recklessly after possible prey, and here and there lit upon a small, dwindled hoard of Indian meal or tea-leaves, painfully saved to keep the life in some feeble old body or pining child, until—goodness knows when, since Invertully's prospect of relief lies ever remote and vague, beyond the reach of anything save a wistful “plase God.”

And now, at this lowest ebb of the Miskerrys' fortunes, here was Bridget's sister Rosanne sending word that she would be stepping over to see them in the course of the day; and they without a scraepen in the house, good or bad, except a dish of salt leaves off the rocks, scandalous fare to set before a guest.

Rosanne, very much Bridget's elder, had lately returned widowed from a long absence in America, and was staying with her husband's people away beyond Kildrum. “And a poor hungry country she's after comin' back to bedad,” the Miskerrys had commented; “but sure the crathur'd be worse off belike in the States wid nobody to do her a hand's turn.” This would be her first meeting with them, and that she should find them in such miserable circumstances was a sore mortification to her sister, whom it drove to suggest the inhospitable device of preventing her visit. As Bridget picked

up her fuel, the thought that there was “ne'er a stick of furniture in it, nor e'er a bit fit to offer a pig, let alone a Christian,” occupied her mind, until the rising clamour of winds and waves scared away every consideration but fear for the safety of Bob. She went through what seemed a long spell of darkening dread, before her eyes were rejoiced by the sight of the pookawn struggling back to shore. Bob landed at some little distance, and by the time she had scrambled across the intervening boulders he had already disembarked, and stood surveying his take, which lay on a wreath of brown weed. It was a very small film of a flatfish, which might eventually have developed into a flounder, only for this premature arrest. “That's the whole of it,” Bob said as his wife approached. His tone was half deprecating and half defiant.

“He looks to be but very young yet,” Bridget said, wishing to put things as pleasantly as possible. “I question could we do aught wid him.”

“Sure not at all,” said Bob, and drawing the bundle of sticks from her apron, he turned home-wards up the bleak and blustery strand.

“And what great matter, so long as you aren't drownded goin' after them?” Bridget said, trotting beside. “Me sister might maybe think bad of settin' off in this outrageous win’,” she added hopefully.

“Och, she'll come fast enough, no fear,” said Bob.

And Bob was right, even more so than he knew. For when they reached their doorway, who should be standing in it but Rosanne herself? A lift on the road had brought her unexpectedly early, and she had, in fact, been waiting there for upwards of half an hour.

Bridget's first thought, at sight of her sister, was, "And herself in a bonnet." That head-dress, which is almost a mark of caste at Invertully, dismayed the young hostess with a keen sense of the incongruity between her own squalid dwelling and the grandeur of her guest, whose good black shawl and gown strengthened the bonnet's effect. "It's the quare show of a scarecrow I am this minyit," she said to herself, becoming suddenly alive to the raggedness of the wisp which covered her dark head, and to the fact that her feet had no covering at all.

However, Rosanne was, of course, duly bidden kindly welcome, and presently seated beside Bridget on a plank supported at either end by a little pile of shingle-stones, while Bob hastily thrust pieces of drift-wood in among the blinking embers. The sooty pot, with its simmering salt leaves, sat by the hearth, and Bridget's eyes kept turning towards it furtively, as if it held some guilty secret. "It's a long step from here to Killduff," Rosanne remarked. "And I'd be a great while walking it, only for the jaunt I got on Keogh's car. 'Twas scarce ten o'clock and I settin' off, and now it's goin' on for twelve."

“ ‘Deed, woman dear, it’s perished you had a right to be, out all that while in the cold win’,” said Bridget, “ and starved, too, if——” she was beginning to add, when she stopped suddenly, and changed colour as swiftly as the pink embers which Bob was blowing up. But Rosanne interposed almost as abruptly, with much eagerness, “ Tellin’ you the truth, Biddy, if it wouldn’t be too troublesome to you altogether, this is what I was wondering when I was comin’ along, whether by any chance you could give me e'er a weeny bit of the sayweed for me dinner, the same as we did be aitin’ of an odd time at home in Dunlane. I disremimber now the name we had for it—was it sloke or dilisk?—but the look of it and the flavour I mind right well, and there’s nothin’ in the world I’d liefer have a taste of. So I was thinkin’ to meself, and I comin’ along, that yous livin’ convanient to the shore might happen to have a bit ready in the house. Bedad, if I had that I wouldn’t so much as look at e'er a thing else, for I don’t be very hungry in meself these times at all. Sure the strong air here away is mate and drink to them that’s not used to it.”

“ D’ye hear that, Bob ?” Bridget called to her husband, with relief and a sort of triumph in her tone, while he, whisking the lid off the pot, lifted it up, saying, “ Would that be what you was thinkin’ of, ma’am ? Salt laves is what I heard called to it ever in the county Mayo.”

"Aye, is it, the very same," their visitor said, peering through ocean-odorous steam at a dark mass of a substance that resembled discoloured spinach mixed with glue. "Isn't it a lucky thing now that yous chanced to have some ready? For I know it takes a power of boilin', and I can't be stoppin' long wid yous, lest I'd miss the car goin' back."

The dinner of salt leaves must be considered, on the whole, a success, since the "company" contrived to consume a quantity which, eked out with enthusiastic praises, nearly satisfied her entertainers; and that was the main point. But a knowledge of her meditations on her homeward way would have caused them more mingled feelings.

"It was great good luck," Rosanne said to herself, "that I had time to be takin' a look round before they 'come in. I always had more than a notion they were none too well off; but sure it's starvin' they are altogether. Ne'er a bit or sup in the place, let alone a chair or a table. Biddy the crathur hasn't a pick on her bones, and her dacint lad's face isn't me hand's width across. The deer knows the people are to be pitied. Howane'er, glory be to goodness, I've got enough to take them two out of it anyway, and give them a fair start on the other side. You might as well be sowin' the money in the ditches as lettin' them have it over here, where they're all livin' on the stones along the strand, like as if the whole of them was so much

rubbish swep' down for the waves to be washin' out of the way. If Biddy and himself'll be said by me, it's off to the States they'll go the first passage they can get."

Thus it came about that this was the last dinner-party ever given by the Miskerrys at Invertully. For they were "said" by Bridget's sister, and a few days afterwards—in fact, not many days ago—were voyaging away on board the great, crowded, orderly Cunard liner. Not without regretful memories of the little empty house left forlorn on that desolate strand, among whose shaggy rocks, however, other people are still seeking their dinner of salt leaves.

A FALSE START

A FALSE START

I

AT intervals all through his day-long journey from Arranard to Dublin Edmund Blake wondered what had possessed him to undertake such a commission, but he could not account for it more satisfactorily than by ascribing it to the way in which his presence of mind habitually deserted him on the rare occasions when he accidentally fell in with an acquaintance. Sometimes it had thus betrayed him, a solitary and unsociable bachelor, into rash acceptances of invitations, out of which he afterwards scrambled lamely and lyingly, if at all ; sometimes, as now, it entangled him in engagements whence he could devise no means of escape whatever. He had suddenly met at Ogreine Post Office his aunt Emily, who lived at a safe distance away beyond Shanrone, and, because she asked him to dinner, he had hurriedly announced, what happened to be a true and sufficient excuse, his immediate departure for Dublin on business. Then she had counted her change more than once while he bought his stamps, and at the end of their transactions had made her request. It related to one Anne Millen,

her former housemaid, who had been poorly left a widow with a little boy, and had now fallen into hopelessly bad health. She had written from Dublin that she had a good chance of admission into the Incurable Hospital, only how could she be leaving Charlie to run wild about the streets, or get himself shut up in the workhouse or reformatory? Whereupon Mrs. Blake had offered to board the child out with some decent family in her own neighbourhood, and Mrs. Millen had thankfully agreed to the plan, in the way of which only one obstacle stood—the difficulty of transporting Charlie to Arranard. His mother wrote that he was too little and small entirely to be travelling on the train alone, and, as no escort seemed to be forthcoming, the arrangement remained impracticable. But now, said Edmund's aunt, if Edmund would not mind finding Mrs. Millen's lodgings when he was coming home, and just putting the child into the train at the Dublin terminus, and seeing that he changed rightly at the different junctions, it would be a great charity. Mrs. Millen's address was 4 Dobbyn Court, Lundy Alley, a low, out-of-the-way place, she feared.

Mr. Blake found, after some dismal wandering through a frosty November fog, that this description suited No. 4 Dobbyn Court exactly enough. The spacious, well-proportioned house had fallen with the fortunes of its neighbourhood, and was now let in tenements. Its broad, shallow-stepped

staircase had lost its elaborate balustrade, and was rapidly becoming a dangerous and dirty ladder. Far up it, a wide door with blackened silver plates admitted him into a bleak room, where a marble chimney-piece, intricately carved and cracked, surmounted a fireless grate, and a richly garlanded ceiling looked down on a bare floor, in the middle of which the most conspicuous object was a large sooty kettle. Mrs. Finny, its proprietress, had stepped up with the loan of it to Mrs. Millen, who was short of coal, as she explained to Mr. Blake, and of almost everything else, as he inferred from the aspect of herself and her apartment. That she would not want for anything long was likewise clearly evident, and when Mr. Blake told his errand, she seemed at first to waver between a wish to keep Charlie until the last, and a wish to see him start on the way to provision and protection. Perceiving this, Mrs. Finny spoke out her opinion frankly—

“ ‘Deed then, Mrs. Millen, it’s very wrong you’d be doin’ to not take your chance of gettin’ yourself into that hospital. Sure, now, it’s delightful. I was in it meself one day, a couple of year ago, seein’ me cousin’s wife that went there in a deep decline, and you wouldn’t believe the comfort she said she had in it. But wid me own eyes I seen her aitin’ her dinner, and it brought up to her on a little round tray, wid a grand white fringed cloth, if you please, and everything as elegant as it could stick.

Oranges, she said, they'd be givin' her, or anything else she'd take and fancy. The finest in the land might be contint to be gettin' their deaths in the likes of such a place, and bedad, it's the happy woman the Lord's intendin' you to be, Mrs. Millen, if it's to the Incurables you're goin'. Very thankful you had a right to be, ma'am, instead of talkin' foolish about not partin' wid the child, that's ne'er a chance in the world here, when you're away, except goin' to loss about the streets, learnin' every manner of villainy."

"There isn't a better child in Ireland than Charlie, the crathur," said Mrs. Millen. "Where are you, sonny? Come and spake to the gentleman—I thought he was in it just this minyit."

"He's apt to ha' slipt out on you unbeknownst," said Mrs. Finny. "Och, no—sure, there he is, warmin' himself behind th'ould kettle." With that Mr. Blake became aware of two eyes shining over the flaky black lid, and Mrs. Finny presently pulled struggling into view the rest of their owner, a very small shock-headed urchin, whose garments hung on and off him in large rectangular tatters, like loose slates, and whose countenance, as far as grime and elf-locks permitted observation, expressed a mixture of anger and alarm. Mr. Blake, on his part, gazed aghast at this hopeful travelling companion.

Next morning, however, when they met by appointment at the railway terminus, he would

hardly have recognized the child had it not been for the presence of Mrs. Finny acting as convoy, so transformed was Charlie's appearance by a process of combing and clipping, and a whole suit of the sort technically termed "reach-me-downs," the funds for which Mr. Blake had supplied. Charlie's mother had watched his departure with heart-broken pride, and a feeling that life contained more precious things than any Incurable Hospital, if only she could have kept a hold of them. During the long day's journey, his conduct quite corresponded with his new air of respectability. Hour after hour he sat silent and still, save for such movements as were occasioned by the consumption of a huge twopenny bun with which he was presented on the way, and at which he worked with successful perseverance. As they drew near their destination Mr. Blake began to reflect that after all he had not been much the worse for the gossoon's society. But a few stations short of Arranard, the stout priest who had hitherto shared their compartment alighted, leaving them alone, and they were no sooner moving on again than Charlie rapidly drew forth from his pocket a slender brown purse, which he handed to Mr. Blake, saying, "I was only waitin' for that one to quit. There might be the price of me ticket in it."

"Did your mother give it to you?" Mr. Blake asked, surprised at this development of resources.

“Sure, not at all,” said Charlie ; “I got it off an ould gintleman was readin’ a picture-book on the stall at the place where you gave me the cake. It’s the first one ever I took, unless an ould handkercher that wasn’t any good. But it was me new coat gave me a great chance this time. They wouldn’t ever let me be standin’ so close alongside them before. That’s the way Dick Molloy has the luck ; his clothes is oncommon dacint. I wisht he’d just seen me grabbin’ this,” Charlie added regretfully, as if missing the crown of his triumph. “Wudn’t you thry what’s in it, sir ? You might get a pound-note. I only squinted inside it yet. Maybe I’ll have another chance, if there’s a crowd on the platform and we gettin’ out.”

Horror grew upon Mr. Blake along with these revelations, which were made in a tone of exulting confidence. He stared blankly at the complacent pickpocket opposite, and then searched hastily through the purse for some clue to the address of its lawful owner, but, finding only a few small coins, flung it disgustedly out of the window. Charlie uttered a howl. “Och, there was shillin’s in it ; I seen a couple at all events. You done right to be throwin’ away the purse, for fear the peelers would be gettin’ it on you ; but now you’re after losin’ the bit of money and everythin’.” He burst into tears of bitter mortification and disappointment. To see the fruits of his sweet first success thus wantonly destroyed was indeed heart-rending,

especially as he had handed them over in all their freshness, even unreckoned, being moved by a sentiment of profound gratitude towards the patron who had showered such unprecedented benefits upon him, culminating in that prodigious bun.

“ You young miscreant,” said Mr. Blake, “ I’ve as good a mind as ever I had in my life just to give you in charge to the police the minute we get to Arranard.”

This threat froze Charlie into speechless terror. Into what fatal snare had he fallen? It had never for a moment occurred to him that this princely bestower of splendid clothing and sumptuous refreshments, who was treating him to a more wonderful excursion than ever he had imagined, could possibly have any affinity with the rest of the respectable world, whose proceedings towards him had been so completely different, and whose allies were the still more awful “ polis.” But now it appeared that, whatever he might have done, the stranger was in league with them all, and as ready as any of them to invoke those horrible powers. As the train swept past a little lamp-lit station without stopping, Charlie caught a glimpse of two helmeted figures on the platform, and shrank back into his corner, meditating the possibility of a desperate bolt for freedom when they reached Arranard.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blake, though much less overwhelmingly discomposed, felt quite seriously con-

cerned about this thank-offering. He was subject to severe attacks of scrupulousness, and one of these now supervened upon considering the criminal propensities manifested by the person whom he had been the means of importing into his parish. It seemed clear to him that he could not justifiably allow a trained Dublin thief to be domesticated, without a word of warning, in a family whose property and morals might alike suffer from the presence of such an inmate. Yet to speak that word, with the effect, perhaps, of further overcasting the unfortunate little wretch's sufficiently beclouded prospects in life, seemed altogether out of the question. In the few minutes which were left him for deliberation, no better expedient suggested itself to him than that he personally should retain charge of Charlie Millen, until some more suitable quarters could be found. Accordingly, upon reaching Arranard, Charlie was firmly gripped, and transferred to an outside car, from which, after a long, dark drive, he descended at the door of what he ascertained to be, not the police barracks, but Mr. Blake's own house.

And here at Lissangort, as it turned out, Charlie lodged for many a night. It was one of those establishments where things take their course with unlimited leisureliness, and where all business not immediately pressing is wont to be docketed "some time or another" for an indefinite period. There was really no urgency in the case of Charlie Millen;

and when the boy had been handed over to Mrs. Judy Devine, the housekeeping cook, Mr. Blake, withdrawing to his solitary abode in a remote wing, soon ceased to think at all frequently about the matter. Mrs. Devine, an elderly and sociable person, did not despise Charlie's company, being often lonesome, when none of her special cronies happened to have looked into her kitchen, and when the two maids were what she described as "steeled off wid themselves the deer knows where." She found him useful, too, in various small domestic duties. The guarded warning which Mr. Blake had thought fit to give her had taken the form of an assurance that "the young rascal was as sharp as a needle, and up to anything," so, falling in with this view, she readily ascribed to Charlie the possession of very unusual abilities, apparent in his handiness about shelling peas and plucking chickens. His diminutive size, for, although nearly nine, he looked barely six, helped to give an impression of precocity, and he was pronounced by everybody to be "quare and ould-fashioned." From time to time Mrs. Devine reported upon him to the master, always, because she perceived that this was expected, emphasizing his remarkable cuteness and sense, and always, because she wished to retain his society and services, declaring him as good as gold and as honest as the day. These statements pleased Mr. Blake, being in conformity with his own expressed opinion, and

at the same time enabling him to say to himself, "My good woman, if you knew but all." Upon the rare occasions when he fell in with Charlie, he easily convinced himself that the boy's conversation and manners denoted singular shrewdness and intelligence. If he stood in sheepish silence, he was assumed to harbour wiliness too intense for words; if he whispered hoarsely, "'Tis, your honour," and "I do not, your honour," his replies were chuckled over as sparklingly epigrammatic. Even his habit of fishing for pinkeens with a crumb on a crooked pin argued a very peculiar ingenuity. In fact, Mr. Blake came to regard Charlie Millen, the typically quick-witted street arab, as a discovery—by no means an invention—of his own, and to make a personal matter of the knowingness, skill, and daring which he had diverted from a career of crime.

As for Charlie himself, he quickly grew contented with his new surroundings, and left off dreaming of his mother. Lissangort kitchen seemed to him a paradise of unforbidden plenty, where he had no temptation to prowl and pilfer, as he had had to do in the cold and hungry other world, with its foe-infested streets and tantalizing shop-windows. Presently that part of his life began to grow almost unimaginable among these altered circumstances; a mist filmed over his memories, and his disused predaceous instincts dwindled away. But even if that had not happened, one recollection, which re-

mained vividly in his mind, would have prevented them from ever again misleading him. The master's strong condemnation of his thieving had made upon him a profound impression, which persisted long after he had ceased to be haunted by dread of the police. For the seldom-seen and all-commanding master became Charlie's deity, whom he worshipped from afar, with a devoutness rather singularly disinterested. Indeed, it might have been called the central fact in his uneventful existence. As the years went by, nothing particularly noteworthy befell him, except his increase in size and in capacity for doing odd jobs, so that he was sometimes employed out of doors. Fishing continued to be his favourite amusement, but his ambition gradually mounted from pinkeens and crooked pins to "troutses" and real hooks. The dream of his life was that he might some day catch a fish which Mrs. Devine would pronounce fit for the master's breakfast.

II

The passage of the next decade left as trivial traces as might be at Lissangort House. A somewhat burlier master, a slightly stiffer-jointed cook, and a small, quiet youth, lately a smaller, quieter child, beheld its close. Tommy, the brown cart-

horse, had died, and Bobby, his successor, differed chiefly in name. Maggie Nolan, the young house-maid, had married Pat Hedican, the gardener's son, and Lizzie Farrell, her senior in the service, had undertaken to discharge her duties for the present single-handed, with a view to securing the situation later on for a growing-up niece. But it is rather invidious to select these incidents as especially worthy of record. Beyond their gates, the most remarkable innovation was the coming of the master's bachelor cousin, Mr. Gerald Warton, to occupy Carrickman House, which had long stood empty in its adjacent demesne. Immense wealth was attributed to Mr. Warton by local opinion, based mainly upon the improvements which he had set about making. They included the repairing of a ruined lodge, in which he placed a gamekeeper, whose principal occupation at first was the rearing of pheasants. Fabulous rumours ran as to the number of eggs that were being hatched, and the ton-weight of grain consumed by the multiplying broods. Certainly the field about Carr's lodge was thickly studded with coops, and the queer, strangled crows of the cock-pheasants might frequently be heard.

It was not Mr. Warton's sportsmanlike tastes, however, that made his arrival in the neighbourhood a matter of some importance at Lissangort, but the fact that he and the master had been friends in youth, and now, in a measure, resumed

their intimacy, thus breaking through the master's long-established custom of neither visiting nor receiving visitors. Once a week or so Mr. Warton would step across by the field-path, which was the shortest route to his cousin's place, and now and then would have his company on the way home. Mrs. Devine said it was "a Christian comfort to see the poor master behavin' himself different at all from an ould blind bat mopin' up in his roost." And Lizzie Farrell said that if he "had the trouble of clanin' up for company, you wouldn't wonder if he had as lief they stayed away ; but when all he had to do was to say, 'How's yourself?' it was quare enough he wouldn't like a bit of variety of an odd while." The Widdy Becker, on the contrary, who had dropped into the kitchen with some indefinite object, remarked as she cooled her second cup of tea, that she "didn't notice much signs of mopin' on his honour, glory be to God ; he was off-hand and hearty enough any time a body might happen to meet him. And, for the matter of that, she recollects an ould Colonel Trant was livin' at Newtownmahony in her time, and as often as he'd see anybody offerin' to turn in at his gate, off wid him hot-fut to the house-yard, to be lettin' loose the big baste of a bloodhound he kep' convanient, that 'ud freeze your heart stiff, when you'd hear the cruel roars of it, throttin' along the shrubberies towards you. There wasn't many went visitin' him. Sure, 'twas just a fatigue some people took agin'

seein' their neighbours, the same as other people took agin' aitin' their bit of food."

At the time when Widdy Becker was philosophizing thus, the master and his cousin were smoking in the dusty book-room, where they had met after a longer interval than usual. Mr. Warton had been away for a month, and related that upon his return to Carrickman he had found Carr, the keeper, in much concern about the pheasants. They had begun to disappear mysteriously some time before, and were now doing so in serious numbers.

"Carr himself's above suspicion," Mr. Warton said, "but I doubt that he's any great good as a detective. I must look into the thing myself as soon as I can. I have to be off again to-morrow for a week or ten days."

"I'll tell you what," said Mr. Blake; "I'll set that young ruffian of mine, Charlie Millen, to keep an eye on them while you're away. They'll be bright lads if they circumvent *him*. I wouldn't mind betting any money that he'll have the ins and outs of the whole affair ready for you by the time you're back. It's a case of diamond cut diamond, you know."

"Are you sure he mightn't be a little too sharp for us?" Mr. Warton said. But his cousin replied—

"Oh, as to that, he's straight enough, no fear. We'll have him up here and tell him what we want."

So Charlie, wondering and apprehending, obeyed a summons to the book-room. "The master's wantin' to spake to you," Lizzie said, "and Mr. Warton's along wid him. Are you after doin' e'er a quare job over there?"

Charlie's conscience was quite clear on that point, yet it could not keep him from quaking, especially at the master's first remark: "I dare say you've heard that Mr. Warton has been missing his pheasants?"

"Sorra the feather of a one of them I ever laid eyes on, your honour," said Charlie. "It's only fishin' up the river I do be, now and agin, for troutses, and there's nothin' in it unless a couple of water-hins."

"Well, we'd like you to leave the trout alone for a bit, and keep a look-out to see where those pheasants are going, and then bring word to Mr. Warton or to me, but of course say nothing to anybody else."

"I will so, your honour, and I will not, your honour," Charlie said submissively, perplexed.

"We must be careful that it doesn't come round to Carr," said Mr. Warton, "for he might misunderstand, and take offence."

After a few further suggestions and injunctions, Charlie was dismissed, and returned to the kitchen with a slight tendency to self-importance, counteracted by a strong sense that he had not the least idea how he could set about doing what the master

required. As the door closed, Mr. Blake said that he saw the young villain had some dodge already in his mind.

Charlie, of course, found his friends all agog with curiosity about the interview, but he made a good start by refusing to answer any questions upon the subject, declaring, with discreet subtlety, that he had been "bid to not let on what they were talkin' about, even to Mr. Carr himself, who was mindin' the pheasants." Naturally, therefore, ere that September sun had set behind Slieve Corish, all whom it in any way concerned had learned how Mr. Blake and Mr. Warton were after speaking to young Millen about the Carrickman pheasants, whatever he might have to say to them.

Now the persons most responsible for the diminishing of Mr. Warton's little flock were the three Brierleys, Peter and Joe, who worked on Matt Reilly's farm, and lived in a cabin near the Arranard road, with Charlotte, their sister, who was employed in the kitchen up at Carrickman House close by across the fields. The Brierleys had always had the name of being very respectable people, and might never have risked losing it, only for a concatenation of tempting circumstances, which drew them aside from the paths of rectitude. One link in this chain was the accidental discovery of stray pheasants resorting to a secluded meadow-corner, muffled away beneath lofty hedges, whither they could be lured more numerously by a judicious

system of feeding ; another was the possession of a friend constantly driving to and fro a grocer's van, which he willingly turned down the Brierleys' bit of boreen, to pick up any parcel they might happen to have directed to an acquaintance of his in Arranard, whose brother kept a poult erer's shop in Dublin. Charlotte's part in the proceedings was to provide an ample and attractive supply of broken meats for the enticing of their victims ; to keep vigilant eyes and wits about her in case of threatening signs ; and, being neat-fingered, to parcel up the game in packages that dissembled their contents. The trio had carried on these operations for a considerable time without arousing the suspicions of even their nearest neighbours and friends. Had they done so they would have incurred almost unanimous censure, for there was little difference of public opinion upon the question whether or no pheasants might be regarded as common property.

Mrs. Felix Moriarty, an authoritative personage, expressed the general view accurately enough one day during a discussion. "If it was runnin' wild in the woods the crathurs were," she said, "I wouldn't have a word agin one body makin' free wid them more than another. But when a person does be rearin' them onnathural under hins, and feedin' them the same as young turkeys, it stands to raison you had a right to be lettin' them alone, unless you

would be evenin' yourself to a pack of tinkers, interfarin' wid people's chickens and ducks."

The only dissentient voice was Bill Dowdall's, and he had no better argument than that "if a man seen a chucken wid a tail on it half a yard long sittin' aitin' all before it in the middle of his bit of oats, 'twould be a poor case if he mightn't drive a stone at it," which his hearers regarded as merely a rather irrelevant exception to Mrs. Moriarty's rule.

Tidings of Charlie Millen's interview with Mr. Blake and Mr. Warton reached the Brierleys in due course, and the inference they drew was that he had somehow fallen under suspicion with respect to the missing pheasants. This misconception caused them no uneasiness, but moved them to disdainful mirth.

"Is it the chap that does be moonin' up and down fishin' the river, where there never was heard tell of anythin' the len'th of me little finger since the world began? A great offer he'd make at it—cock him up!"

Carr, the gamekeeper, on the other hand, came nearer the mark, and, waxing as indignant as his employer had foreboded, vowed that he wouldn't be very long sending to the right-about any young jackass who had the impudence to come spying round his premises. On Charlie himself the incident had laid a heavy burden of embarrassment and perplexity, the more so because his master was just then called away to Dublin for a week on business, and left him

with vague but peremptory commands to have detected something by the time they met again. With the best will in the world to execute his commission, Charlie could not see an inch of any way towards it. He thought it his duty, however, as a preliminary step, to desert his beloved river, where the spreading crystal circles perpetually wove snares to catch his hopes of a bite, while elm leaves had begun to float by in crinkled flakes of fiery gold ; and he substituted for his pleasant angling hours long spells of unprofitable sauntering, harassed and aimless, as near as he ventured to the keeper's lodge. He had all the time an exasperated sense that he was losing a grand chance of acquitting himself well in the master's eyes. For success in this affair would have been more creditable than the capture of the largest trout that ever swam ; but unluckily it seemed no less out of reach.

On the day before the master was expected home, Andy Clery, the general man, and Pat Hearn, the gardener, attended Grattanstown Races with so much assiduity that they were disposed next morning to take things very easily indeed. Thus it happened that in the afternoon, when the master had to be fetched back from Arranard on the car, no better driver was forthcoming than Charlie Millen. He had seldom been entrusted with such a task, and would have felt some dignified pride in handling the reins, only that it was crushed by his consciousness of how complete a failure he must report. "For,"

he said to himself, "the devil a fut of me knows what's goin' wid them ould fowls ; and they say there's a dozen more of them missin' since Sunday." As he jolted along past the mouth of the Brierleys' deep-banked boreen, who should be standing there but Joe Brierley, with a good-sized wicker hamper set on the road beside him.

"Have you e'er a vacancy about you?" he called to Charlie.

"Sure, there's ne'er an atom on the car," said Charlie, "except meself and the master, when we pick him up at the station. Is it a sate you're wantin'?"

"Only just for the hamper," said Joe. "It's empty mineral-wather bottles goin' back to Martin the grocer's in Main Street. Me sisther brought them down from the House, and Christy Gatchell was intindin' to call for it wid the van, but he's after sendin' us word by O'Connor's ploughman that he's lost a shoe below, at Clonbwee, and won't be passin' this way at all ; so I was lookin' out for some one else to give it a lift."

"Och, to be sure," said Charlie, enjoying this exercise of patronage. "Stick it up, and welcome."

"Just drop it at Martin's door passin' by," said Joe, as he hoisted up the hamper, and secured it with a cord to the front and back rails, "and lave word it's for Christy Gatchell ; he'll know all about it, and 'twill be in time for the night mail anyway —the last delivery I mane to say."

"All right!" said Charlie, and Joe departed, pleased at having effected his purpose, which he had done in opposition to the wishes of his brother and sister. It was running too big a risk altogether, they said, to be sending them about promiscuous that way, by people who might as likely as not make some quare, unhandy mistake, and land them the mischief knows where. But Joe declared that they'd been kept full long already, and he didn't see the sense of letting two or three half-crowns go to loss. So, being a headstrong man, he slipped out after dinner unawares, and did as we have seen.

Charlie drove the seven miles to Arranard without any adventures, for one can hardly so call the excessive laziness of the skewbald mare, who would respond to the utmost efforts of her unfamiliar driver by nothing better than brief and uneasy spells of lolloping, interposed between the sleepiest jogs-trots. Consequently, when they at length reached the town, he made straight for the station, lest he should be late for his master's train, and deferred the dropping of Joe Brierley's hamper until they were on their homeward journey. The sight of his master alighting on the platform, followed by Mr. Warton, caused him to regret more keenly than ever that he was bringing no news about the pheasants. Mr. Warton, it appeared, had accepted a seat on the car, which made necessary a shifting of the hamper, and as Charlie unfastened Joe Brierley's knots, the dreaded questioning began.

“What,” said the master, “has become of Andy Clery?”

This, indeed, was readily answered: “If you plase, your honour, he’s that stiff to-day wid his rheumatics he couldn’t stir hand or fut.”

“Then why didn’t Pat Hearn drive?”

Here was no difficulty either. “If you plase, your honour, he was buryin’ his mother’s brother over away at Ballyskreen this mornin’.”

“Well now, Charlie, how about those pheasants? Can you tell Mr. Warton where he should be looking for them?”

Just then Charlie was gathering the hamper in his arms to lift it from the car-seat, and he replied with a despondent gasp, “I cannot, your honour. Bedad, now, I could tell you as much or as little, if it was packed up inside of that I was, along wid th’ould bottles, ever since your honours quit,” he added, setting it down heavily on the gravel.

Mr. Warton stooped over it to read the address, which was written on a page of an old account-book, and tied on with a leather bootlace. “Bottles?” he said immediately. “Why, what’s this?” And he twitched out a little russet-barred feather, which showed its tip through the wickerwork.

He answered himself promptly by cutting the string and throwing back the lid, which disclosed to view nothing less than three brace of fine pheasants in their gay brown plumage. The hamper, in fact, was filled with them, save a few empty bottles

inserted for the purpose of jingling plausibly. Scarcely could Charlie believe his eyes, and amazedly they widened in his sharp-chinned sun-burnt face, beneath the shadowy shock of black hair feebly repressed by a small cloth cap. But while he stood dumfounded, he was nearly upset by a thump on the back. "Well done, yourself," said the master. "You made a good haul when you were about it. From Joe Brierley, you say? They're not the people I'd have suspected; but one never knows where one is with anybody, and that's a fact. I didn't overstate his capabilities, Jerry, you see. 'Packed up inside along with the bottles' — the young rascal."

"Couldn't have made a neater job of it," said his cousin. "By Jove, Eddy, I'll tell you what, you ought to put him into the constabulary. Evidently that's what he's cut out for, if he has another inch or so to grow. I can give you a recommendation to Colonel Perry, any day. He'd be invaluable in the detective department."

"Exactly my idea," said Mr. Blake. "How'd you like the notion of being a police sergeant, Charlie?"

To these, and to other praises and prophecies, Charlie listened with bewildered dismay. He still retained enough of his original sentiments towards the police to make him feel much as a hare might have done at the proposal that it should occupy a prominent post in connexion with a pack of hounds. The threat

of such a reward urged him to explain how quite accidentally he had come by the hamper ; yet it was difficult to disclaim all the merit so enthusiastically ascribed to him. In reply to inquiries respecting his stratagems, he could only stammer, " I—I just walked about, sir " ; whereupon he was assured that he had done it to some purpose, and might look forward to being a county inspector one of these days. With that fearful promotion looming before him he started on his drive homeward. It contrasted and corresponded in several points with his first journey along that road nearly a dozen years ago. Then he had sat huddled under the darkness of a winter evening, dreading, in a childish panic, that the police barracks were his destination. Now, as he jogged towards the September sunset, he was scared, hardly less childishly, by the same fate from a different aspect. Then he had just commenced as a successful pickpocket, a career nipped in the very bud. Now he was considered to have taken most brilliantly his first step in a totally distinct and yet allied calling.

As they approached the Brierleys' boreen, down which he was directed to turn, for the purpose of bringing home to the criminals their evil deeds, he said to himself, with a sinking heart, " It's ragin' they'll all be, and thinkin' me the worst in the world. I'd no hand or part in it, anyway. I wisht to goodness I'd niver took the ould gentleman's purse. Bedad, I wisht everybody 'ud lave meddlin'

wid other people's things alone." An aspiration which, though not based upon the loftiest principles, is yet so highly moral that it suggests a fitting conclusion for this chapter from Charlie Millen's history.

A FALSE ALARM

A FALSE ALARM

ABOUT Christmastide, in a certain year, important events happened among the young Neligans. Terry and Nan, the eldest of them, who had managed the little hillside farm ever since their parents' death, had long foreseen some change, because, toil as they would, it seemed impossible to get a decent living out of that stony patch ; but now a crisis in their affairs had come, for Terry Neligan was going to marry Lizzie Maguire, and Nan Neligan Lizzie's brother Peter. The Maguires, moreover, had many relations in "the States," which helped the young couples to resolve upon selling their interest in the holding, and starting for New York.

It was not only for themselves, however, that Terry and Nan had to decide ; there were also Jack and Norah, the younger brother and sister, who at fifteen and sixteen could not be considered old enough to make their own plans. Accordingly, at a family council, it was decided that Norah, not being very robust, should go for the present to her sister Maggie, who had married a railway-man living near Dublin, and wanted help with many

small children ; whereas "a big, sturdy lump of a boy like Jack had a right to do finely in the States, and would be well worth his passage-money." And on these lines their affairs were settled.

Both were deeply dissatisfied with the arrangements. Norah hated being left behind ; and Jack's heart was set on becoming apprentice to Mr. Felix Doyle, the Dublin cabinet-maker, an old family friend, and native of Coolageary, whither he had come for the Christmas holidays. Thus he had seen the carved blackthorn which was deemed Jack's masterpiece, and had thereupon offered to take him as apprentice at half the usual fee.

Jack would have jumped gleefully at this proposal, with its chances of learning joinery and turnery, and, above all, of getting the School of Art lessons for which he longed. But even the half-fee would have been hard to raise, and then there was the cost of his keep until he could earn for himself. Jack was keenly alive to these difficulties, and proudly loth to prolong his dependent state, so he would not urge his wishes. Only to Norah did he express his disappointment, which she largely shared, as her favourite brother's stay in Dublin would have almost reconciled her with her own lot. However, though the weddings were fixed for Christmas, the emigrants would not start till after Easter, and as Jack and Norah were young enough to think this a very long interval, they looked forward with some hopefulness to the

prospect of something in the meanwhile turning up.

On Christmas Eve, the day of the double wedding, everybody was pleased by the arrival in time for the ceremony of the Neligans' only rich relation, their great-aunt, old Cassie Donagh, a childless widow, possessed of incalculable savings. A full dozen miles away, beyond Lough Brean, she kept her solitary house, which was one of three or four dwellings sprinkled in a nook among the mountains. This remoteness, together with her great age and capricious disposition, had made her attendance at the wedding seem very doubtful ; but all her kinsfolk agreed that if she did come it would denote her intention to bestow a handsome wedding-gift upon the children of her niece. Hence their satisfaction when before noon on the great day she drove down their narrow boreen, drawn by a dark, peat-coloured donkey, and seated on a flat, long-shaped cart.

And, sure enough, when taking leave she produced from among the folds of her immense hooded cloak of heavy black cloth a small, carefully tied up packet, which she handed over to the newly married Mrs. Peter Maguire.

“ It’s ten pound,” she said, “ in single notes and sovereigns, half for yourself, Nan, and half for your brother Terry ; and good luck may you have wid it, that are poor Molly Donagh’s childer. ‘Tis herself would be in the fine consternation this day if

she heard tell yous was quittin' out of the ould place, and flouncin' off to furrin lands. Howane'er, it's thravellin' home wid meself now I must be, for poor Jinny, the little ass, makes as many steps of the road as if I was axin' her to bring me all the way to New York."

Mrs. Donagh left her relations surprised and delighted by her liberality. She left them also in a considerable bustle, preparing for an adjournment to the Maguires' house, where the wedding festivities would conclude with a dance. It was the less wonder, therefore, that half-way down the lane Mrs. Peter Maguire called her sister to her and whispered, "Och, Norah, I'm after lavin' Aunt Cassie's money lyin' there on the table at home, and no one behind us but Jack, that 'ud niver have the sinse to think of shuttin' it up. Run back now, and put it somewhere safe. The tin tay-caddy behind the loose stone in the wall, right hand of the hearth, has a good strong lock ; you might slip it into that. And, Norah child, take it out of them quare old rags she has it tied up in. A body might very aisy throw them on the fire, money and all, they look that rubbishy. So just give the key a turn in the lock, and bring it along to me."

Norah sped off, and espied on her way Jack running across their rushy field. Indoors she found the packet lying, as Nan had said, on the kitchen-table. It was wrapped in grimy, unbleached linen,

wound about with twine, tied in many hard knots, which she thriftily undid without cutting. After this, several rag and paper covers appeared alternately, and the last one contained—a few cinders and gravel stones. That was all.

For a minute or two she stared at them in bewilderment. Then she searched wildly and vainly through the room. Finally, she came to a standstill again at the table, and wondered what it meant.

The first explanation that occurred to her was that it might be a joke of Jack's. Not that Jack was at all in a joking mood, having been very quiet and dull ever since the affair of the apprenticeship. And with that flashed across her mind the dreadful thought that perhaps he had taken the money in real earnest, and gone off to Dublin. She remembered how only yesterday she had heard him say that if he had a ten-pound note of his own in the world, he wouldn't call the Queen his aunt, for he would be able to get tools, and set himself up in a little business, till he could come by a few lessons, and no thanks to anybody. Possibly the means of carrying out this plan had been too strong a temptation when suddenly placed within his reach. "And maybe small blame to him if he did," she said to herself; "and he seein' everybody else doin' whatever they had a mind to, and hinderin' him of the only thing his heart's set on. But 'twill be time enough to be makin' excuses for him when I'm

sure it's anythin' except just a trick he's after playin'. Plase goodness that's all it is, and bad enough. They'll all be ragin'; and it's a quare fright he's given me. What had I a right to be doin' now?"

Norah pondered the question anxiously. That Jack was somehow implicated in the matter she could hardly doubt, and she would of course stand by him in any case. It seemed clear that she must conceal her discovery, and she decided to lock the packet up in the tea-caddy just as she had found it. "I wisht it had niver come into the house," she said, as she wrapped up the ugly cinders and stones, and reknotted the twine with haste-clumsy fingers. "I wisht Aunt Cassie 'ud keep her ould pounds to herself, instead of bringing them here for people to be meddlin' wid."

Angrily thrusting it into the caddy, and slipping the key into her pocket, she set off to the Maguires' house, where she hoped she might find Jack ; but, ochone ! he was not there. Somebody cheered her a little by suggesting that he had gone, as he often did, to spend his holiday with the Kellys at Rathallen ; and then it struck her that she had better hide the key, which would prevent any one from opening the caddy that night at least. So she told Nan that she had forgotten to bring it with her, whereupon Nan said, "Musha, then, yourself's the careless, stupid gaby. Lucky for you it is that your head's not loose, or 'tis seldom you'd have it on

your shoulders." And Norah felt blame-worthy enough, though for a different reason. All through the long dances, in which she had to take a part, her guilty conscience made the sound of the key jingling in her pocket seem an audible accusation of falsehood. Once, to her dismay, it fell clattering on the floor as she drew out her hand-kerchief, but her unsuspecting partner picked it up for her, without apparently any other person's notice.

When at last the party broke up, and she was out in the shadowy lane, she hurried on a bit in front of her people, so that she might get home before them, and drop the key down a crack she knew of beside the hearth. But in the dark kitchen this crack could not easily be found, and she was still groping for it when the others came in and surprised her. Bouncing away from the hearth in alarm, Norah dropped the key on the flags, and whisked a cup off the dresser with a corner of her shawl.

"What at all are you at," several voices inquired. "flingin' things about there?"

"The gilt handle broke off of me good pink cup!" said Norah's new sister-in-law, not best pleased at this early beginning of accidents to her outfit of crockery.

"It's not often Norah breaks e'er a thing, I'll say that for her," said Nan, who had hitherto been in the habit of saying quite the contrary.

"I was only lookin' for somethin' I'm after droppin'," Norah explained confusedly.

"Goodness guide us, is it lost you have the key now?" said Nan. "Why, here it is just under me foot. I'll keep it meself this time, plase the pigs. But it's too late to be doin' anythin' this evenin'; we can share the money to-morrow. So I'll just gather me few odds and ends, and we'll be steppin'."

The Maguires accordingly collected some small portable properties and took their leave, after which Norah went to bed, further cast down by this fresh mishap.

After a sleepless and troubled night, Norah rose to begin in a very doleful mood a novel phase of her life with Lizzie Maguire instead of kind-hearted, quick-tempered sister Nan as mistress of the house. By the light, and among the distractions of Christmas Day, however, things did look several degrees less portentously black than when they had loomed through the lonely dark hours, so that she was able to assume a tolerably cheerful demeanour. All the while she was listening for footsteps which she hoped, and others which she dreaded to hear. The former were Jack's. Terry, it is true, said at breakfast that Jack would be sure to stop with the Kellys till the next morning, anyhow; and Norah said to herself that if only she knew that he was really there, she might be contented enough. But that did not keep her from continually peering

down the boreen from the front door, and up the field from the back door, until her sister-in-law inquired whether "she did be always so onaisy," and remarked that the cold wind she had blowing in on them would stiffen a jelly-fish. The steps she dreaded were her sister's; but Nan found so much to do in her new home that she had time only to wish the Neligans a hurried Happy Christmas after Mass. Thus neither Norah's hopes nor her fears were fulfilled, and she made a headache an excuse for going to bed, thereby shortening the longest Christmas Day she had ever experienced.

Next morning began even worse, because she had decided that if Jack were coming back at all, he would be home by breakfast-time; but he did not appear, which sunk Norah into such deep dejection that she could do nothing except sit huddled up in a corner meditating on her troubles. There, in the course of the afternoon, she was found by Nan, who thought to herself, "Sure, now, the crathur's frettin' after me, and not gettin' on too well wid Lizzie Maguire." And, aloud, she said to Norah, "Well, alanna, do you know I'm after hearin' this mornin' from Maggie, that says she'd as lief you'd come up to them right away, for she's tormented tryin' to mind all them childer. So what would you be wishful to do yourself?"

Just then Norah's uppermost feeling was that she would rather be anywhere than in the neighbourhood of the terrible tea-caddy, so she replied

without reflection, " 'Deed, and it's glad I'd be if I was sittin' off to-morrow."

But a moment after she bitterly regretted the speech, for her sister immediately replied, "Sure, I wouldn't wonder if you couldn't do better, and you might belike be ready agin Friday. You'll be wantin' your railway fare up to Dublin, forby a few other odd things, so I'll just fetch a pound out of the caddy."

Thus the dreadful crisis had come at last. Norah longed to flee, but she could only shrink further into the dark corner and await the event. First she heard the key grate in the lock, and presently Nan's voice saying, "I bid her throw away the old rags, but she's left it wisped up in them. Loan me a lick of your knife, Terry, till I cut the string." Next, after what seemed to Norah a vast interval, there was shrill exclamation : "May the saints look up and down upon us this day ! Sure, there's not a pound or a pinny in it at all—nothin' only a couple of dirty burnt cinders and gravelly stones."

Then arose a confusion of voices, as Terry and Lizzie, and Lizzie's mother and sister, who had dropped in, crowded round the table wondering and ejaculating. Very soon Norah heard herself called upon to come over out of that, and tell anything she knew about what was gone with the money. Most reluctantly she emerged, with guilt so clearly written on her disconcerted countenance,

that Terry's tone was in itself almost an accusation as he demanded whether she had put the packet into the caddy on Christmas Eve.

"In course I did, the very same way I got it," said Norah.

"And did you see the money all right," said Terry, "and you puttin' it in?"

"How could I tell what was inside th'ould wrappers?" said Norah.

"Oh, aisy enough you could tell," said Terry, "if that was all. And Nan says that some one for sartin was meddlin' wid the strings. Some of them was half untied and loosened like."

"In my opinion," said Nan, "whoever done it slipped in here after we was all gone to Maguires', and the house standin' empty. Norah left the key behind her lyin' about, that I was checkin' her for and tellin' her she had no right to do——"

"But, sure, she had the key along wid her when she came to our house," interrupted Rose Maguire. "I seen it droppin' out of her pocket, and she dancin' wid Thady Flynn, and he pickin' it up and sayin' if it was the key of her heart, it was, he wouldn't be in a hurry handin' it back to her."

"What for at all did you tell me that untruth?" Nan said to Norah, in a reproachful aside.

"Then there was nobody had a chance of interferin' wid it except them two, Norah and Jack," said Terry. "I mind we left Jack alone in it when we went over to Maguires', and I'm wonderin' all

the mornin' that he hasn't come back. But, bedad ! he's maybe got his own raisons for stoppin' away."

"He never laid a finger on it, that I swear," said Norah. "Ne'er a pinny was took out o' it the time I put it in the caddy."

"And you just after tellin' me you didn't know what was in it !" said Terry. "You can't believe a word that one says," he declared disgustedly, turning to his elder sister.

"If I was in your coat, man, I'd just fetch in Sergeant Daly to her," gaunt Mrs. Maguire said grimly. "He'd get the truth out of her soon enough, you may depind."

"Whethen now, ma'am, I'll thank you to not be troublin' yourself to have any talk out of you about the polis and my sister," Mrs. Peter Maguire said to her mother-in-law. "There was never e'er such a thing heard or thought of among the Neligans, let me tell you."

"And let me tell you, Nan Neligan," said Mrs. Terry, "that it's not of *you* me mother's apt to be axin' lave to pass any remarks she plases in this house."

"Och whist, the pair of yous," Terry said distractedly, viewing with much concern this sudden complication which threatened the peace of his newly constituted little state. "There's no sinse in risin' ructions over it, whatever's happint."

"And it's only terrifyin' the crathur the whole of yous are," said Rose Maguire, who, good-

natured and talkative, was regretting her inopportune observation about the key. "She's lookin' as scared this minyit as a hunted chicken."

"No call to be scared she has, if she'd say where that young rogue's gone off to wid our money," said Terry. "But, howsome'er, I'll wait till I cut the cows' bit of hay, and if by that time she hasn't made up her mind to tell us anything she knows, I'll step down to the barracks, and bid the polis be on the look out any way. It's no joke to be at the loss of ten pound, let alone harbourin' thankless young miscreants that 'ud take a man's last penny off him, as soon as look at him, and never let on a word if they was after watchin' every thief in the country stealin' all before them."

With this direful threat and scathing denunciation Terry went off hastily to the task which he had improvised for himself, leaving the others in somewhat awe-stricken silence.

Norah moved over to the open front door, and stood there for some time listlessly staring out. She was too much preoccupied with coming trouble to notice things that were actually happening; otherwise she would not have been so slow to perceive a sound of wheels creaking down the boreen. It was not until they were rounding the turn within a stone's throw of where she stood that a clear whistle roused her to look up and behold a very amazing sight. There, pattering along with short, quick steps of its shaggy dark legs, came Aunt

Cassie Donagh's little brown donkey, and in the middle of the flat, sideless cart sat something like a dwarfish black tent, which was Aunt Cassie in her cloak. It was all just as it had been the two days ago that seemed as many weary weeks. The only difference was that instead of a strange gossoon, Jack walked at the donkey's head. He wore a most cheerful expression, and the blitheness of his tune made Norah feel as if everything were all right, until she rapidly reflected that this, alas! could not be, and that she must try to warn him of the perils amongst which he had so recklessly ventured. But she had no time to do anything. Everybody else had heard the whistle too, and round from the yard came Terry, while out of the house ran Nan, and Lizzie, and the other Maguires, all excited and astonished. As for Mrs. Donagh, she was so eager to explain her reasons for coming that she began to talk loudly before the cart stopped.

“Ah, Terry and Nan, is it yourselves? Well, now, me good childer, you must be thinkin’ I’m after playin’ the quare trick on you and foolin’ you finely—to be lavin’ you over th’ould rag-bag full of nothin’ only rubbish and dirt. Just lend me a hand, Terry, till I slither me two feet over the edge, and I’ll plump down aisy. You see, the way it happint was this,” she said, having successfully alighted. “I do be thinkin’ many a time that me house might run a good chance of bein’ robbed

some fine day or night, wid tramps and tinkers goin' by, for it's a lonely place, and if e'er a rogue landed in he might have me robbed and murdered convanient enough, before there was a crathur the wiser, unless the poor cat. But I thought it might be a handy conthrvance for decaivin' them sort if I made up some little bags the very same as I kep' me bit of money in, and left nought in them only a taste of thrash, stones and suchlike, the way that if the rogue come on a one of them, he'd consait he'd got it all, and off wid him contint. So I have a good few of them hid about in diff'rnt places, over and above me two rael money-bags, and shiftin' them about I do be continual to bother the villins. And that's how by some manner of means meself mistook me ten-pound bag on Christmas Eve, and brought yous the wrong one instead. 'Twas only last night I found it out, and I fetchin' me twelve-pound bag for a raison I'll prisently tell yous. 'Och,' says I to meself, 'it's the fine abuse the whole of them over there'll be givin' me all this while. But I'll get over to them the earliest I can to-morrow mornin'.' So off I set before the sun got above the hills, and I'd be here a while back, only for the ould yoke breakin' down on me away beyant Glenlisk ; but I wouldn't be here now only for meetin' wid young Jack Neligan comin' across from Rathallen, that put some sort of shape on it for me wid a bit of string, the way it 'ud hould together this far.

“But, talkin’ of him,” Aunt Cassie continued, drawing forth from the depths of her many-folded cloak and shawls two small, linen-covered parcels, “I’ll tell you why I’m after bringing over me twelve-pound bag along wid the other. You see, me dears, ever since the weddin’s I’m minding what you was sayin’ about young Jack and the wish he has for the cabinet-makin’ only for wantin’ the apprentice fee. And after that agin I was thinkin’ of the tinkers and tramps, and of all the ould lone-some bodies that do get murdher done on them for the sake of the savin’s they have gathered up in their houses ; and the end of it was I thought I’d do better to let the child have the twelve pound for a Christmas-box ; and so I was sayin’ to him just now. Bedad ! the caper he took up the side of the hill would surprise you to see, wid all his arms and legs flourishin’ like a hay-spider at the notion of it. So here’s the ten pound, Terry and Nan, and no mistake about it this time. And here’s the twelve pound for young Jack, and good luck to the whole of yous wid it. Sure, I won’t be very long puttin’ by a bit more.”

Norah could hardly realize this sudden happy change, even though Jack was ecstatically shaking her and saying, “Well, now, Noreen, isn’t it grand ? You and I’ll be keepin’ house together one of these days after all. And there’s nothin’ I won’t be carvin’ once I know the right way to set about it.”

“ ‘Deed now,’ she said to herself, “ it’s the quare
fright I got that time, and it’s the fine fool I was.
And sure I hope to goodness that it’s a fine fool I’ll
be whenever I get a quare fright.”

Whereby she no doubt meant to express a wish
that her fears might always prove false alarms.

CURED DEAD

“ Il est mort guéri.”

CURED DEAD

“Il est mort guéri.”

THE black storm-clouds drifted away north-eastward an hour before sunset, but rain still slanted down mistily from the leaden canopy they left behind them. Their departure was noted with satisfaction in a shed near the top of Knockranagh, where two men and two beasts had taken shelter. As the thunder subsided from roars to growls, and the lightning grew like the reflection of a sword brandished aimlessly far off, nor longer thrust with dreadful purpose in at the doorless doorway, the wheaten terriers ceased whining, and their masters began to talk.

“Well, now, that was a great old storm while it lasted,” Andrew Moore said, looking out complacently, “and long enough it lasted, please goodness, between itself and the rain. Rael handy it happened.”

“Handy how are you?” said Mick Brady, who, like Andrew, was a young small farmer. “I’d liefer be after gettin’ a shot at something”—he picked up his gun disgustedly—“than to be sittin’ crouched up

here half the evenin', and wadin' home under the wet."

"'Twas me aunt at home I was thinkin' of," Andrew explained. "There's nothin' terrifies her aquil to a storm of thunder and lightnin'. In the dark corner behind the meal-barrel she is this minyit, you may depind, prayin' away at the rate of a hunt. And sorrow a fut she'll set outside the door this day at all events."

"Sure, it's well to be aisily plased. I wouldn't be wishful to lose a couple of rabbits itself for the sake of terrifyin' e'er an ould woman, if she was twice as bad," said Mick.

"Och, for the matter of that," said Andrew, "she's not a very wicked woman at all, or else it's not apt I'd be to have her keepin' house for me this ten year. Only I'd liefer she was sayin' her prayers paiceable in the house than runnin' over to Mrs. McDonnell's and gabbin', and makin' mischief."

"Aye, to be sure. But what 'ud ail her to be doin' any such thing?" asked Mick.

"More than a trifle meddlesome she is," said Andrew, "and powerful fond of talkin'."

"Faix, I've met two or three people, somethin' to herself, maybe, wid the same sort of complaint," Mick said, risking the loss of a story for the sake of an innuendo.

"Deed yis; the Loughlins do be all great gabble-tongues," said Andrew. "But I had me

own raisons for wishin' she'd keep out of it this day in especiality. I'll tell you the way of it goin' along, for it's time I stepped home to be feedin' the mare."

So Mick heard the way of it as they descended the hillside, avoiding as best they could the intricate network of watercourses which twinkled all over the grassy slopes.

"You see, I'd be sorry these times," he was told, "to do anythin' might disoblige ould Mrs. McDonnell."

"Let alone the granddaughter," ventured Mick.

"Let the granddaughter alone," said Andrew, and alone she was let. "I've done a good few odd jobs for them now and agin," he said. "Sendin' over to me they are when anythin' mishappens ; for how at all would an ould woman and a slip of a girl contend wid managin' a farm ? And this while back I'm doctorin' their young calf that they think a hape of. I wouldn't say meself 'twas any great things ; there's a dale more white on it than I care for. Howsome'er, Kitty McDonnell was makin' a quare polly-molly of it, and feedin' it, and pettin' it, till one day last week they sent over for me in a fine takin', to come see what ailed it ; and, bedad ! I wasn't long findin' out that the crathur had a lump in its throath the size of a pullet's egg.

"So Mrs. McDonnell's notion was to be fetchin' Nolan the vet. to it from Tubberglas. But I dis-persuaded her of that ; and I done right. For, says

I to her, what better could e'er an ould cow-doctor tell her than I meself that there was a lump in the baste's throath ? And where was the sinse, I says to her, she to be payin' him her five shillin's and her ten shillin's, unless just to be givin' him the chance of chargin' her half a crown a bottle for some fancy-coloured mixture, divil a hap'orth suparior to the stuff I'm seein' calves cured wid all me life, and me poor father before me. So the end of it was, I'm thratin' the crathur meself ever since. And finely it was doin', considherin' that the lump hindered it of swallyin' more than a little ; right well it was doin'. But this mornin' I stepped over early to their place, and the first thing I done I looked into its bit of a house, and if there it wasn't lyin' as dead on me as a side of bacon—whatever took it at all."

"Sure, then, that was an awkward thing," said Mick. "They might be apt to think you had a right to let them send for Nolan. But in coarse you could be tellin' them he wouldn't kill it for them for nothin' the way you done."

"What talk would there be of killin' in the matter ?" Andrew demanded sternly. "Keepin' it alive for them better than a week—that's what I done, at all events. But Kitty'd be fretting widout sinse or raison, I well knew, and that was why I made me mind up to thry a scheme of me own. So I shook down a lock of straw over the crathur before I went up to the house ; and who should I meet but Kitty herself just startin' out to see what

way it was. And, says I to her, it couldn't be better, but I was just after givin' it a sleepy sort of drink would keep it lyin' still all the rest of the day. And I bid her, for the life of her, not go next or nigh it, because 'twould be destroyed entirely if anythin' disturbed it before it woke up nathurally of itself, and that mightn't happen till after dark. And herself and the grandmother promised me faithful they wouldn't, and I could depind upon them right enough, if that was all.

" You see, Mick, me plan was this—that I seen a calf the livin' moral of their one wid Fergus Kennedy away at Rathmorris, and that if I could get it off him, and slip it in to-night in place of the other, they need never be the wiser for all their own was dead and buried. And that's what I settled I'd do after me dinner—step over and bespeak it of Fergus himself. Well and good ; in I went at twelve o'clock, and if I did, the first thing me aunt says to me was, what way was the McDonnells' calf ? Grand it was, I tould her—first-rate altogether. So wid that she up and said that presently in a while she'd be runnin' in to Mrs. McDonnell wid somethin' she borried, and then she'd take a look herself to see how the baste was doin'. For, you must know, she's of the opinion herself's quare and knowledgeable about calves, and she as ignorant as the crows that build. So, like a fool, I bid her to not do any such a thing, but leave the crathur quiet and not be

meddlin' wid it. Bedad ! I might ha' known better, for she won't be said by man or mortal agin any notion she takes in her head. The only chance is she might forget it of her own accord, and that she won't do if you let on you mind one way or the other. I knew as well as I knew me own name, and I settin' off, that over at the McDonnells' she'd be about tay-time, and unless they had the wit to purvint her by some manner of manes, that was no ways likely, stirrin' up the calf she'd be, and makin' a short ind of all me whole conthrviance."

"She might consait 'twas only asleep it was, even so," suggested Mick.

"Not she ; there isn't that much agreeability in her," Andrew said resentfully. "So that's why I was as plased as anythin' when I noticed the storm gatherin', and I dhrivin' me bargain wid ould Fergus. Be the same token, divil a penny under five-and-thirty shillin's could I get it off him for ; he knew I wanted it partic'lar, or else I'd wait till the fair a Monday. But, anyhow, he's sendin' it round be the road, and I'm to meet it at O'Leary's Cross this evenin'. All the while I kep' watchin' the sky, and the blacker I seen the clouds lookin' over towards our place, the better I was plased. 'Hurry up, me hayroes,' says I, 'if ye let a couple of good loud claps out of yous, sorra a bit of her'll darken the McDonnells' door this day.' And, sure enough, bangin' away they were like half a dozen big-sized batteries just at about the very time she

would be finished readyin' up and thinkin' of runnin' out. Handier it couldn't happen."

"I wouldn't say it wasn't a convenience to yourself that-a-way," Mick admitted, "and it's mistin' thick yet, to discourage her of stirrin'."

"No fear," said Andrew.

By this time they were nearly down the hill, and had before them full in view the curved end of a green valley, sprinkled with small white farmhouses. The nearest of these was Mrs. McDonnell's; Andrew's own gleamed some quarter of a mile further on. They had come within a few perches of the former, when they saw emerge from its front door a figure at the sight of which Andrew uttered something between a howl and a groan. "Och to goodness," he said, "if it isn't me aunt after all!"

He looked again, hoping that his eyes had deceived him; but their testimony remained unshaken. "Herself it is wid her head wisped in her ould plaid shawl," he declared despairingly. "I needn't throuble meself wid any more inventions after her gabbin' in it. The ould bein' must ha' run over to them hot fut before the thunder begun, and sted there ever since. Here she comes screechin' to us like a flock of say-gulls, as if it was any news she had to be tellin'."

"Glory be to goodness that you're come back safe, Andy, man alive—and Mick Brady." Thus Andrew's aunt was greeting them when her words carried. "It's a great mercy the both of yous aren't

after losin' your lives. Where at all were yous in the awful storm? I meself was just run in to Mrs. McDonnell when it settled to thunder and lighten, and the like of it we never witnessed. And in the middle of it we thought the house was down about our ears, for after one of the claps we heard the most terrific clatter of stones fallin' and smashin'. But when it cleared a bit, and we looked out, what was it but the poor calf's shed fell down all in a hape on top of the crathur! Kilt dead it is."

"Amn't I tellin' them times and again," Andrew said, "that the roof wasn't safe? Well, now, that's the thousand pities of the mislucky calf, and meself after makin' a grand cure of it."

"Quarely cured it is, bedad," said his aunt, "and it lyin' under that weight of ruination. Ne'er a bit of it's to be seen but the one hind leg. Kitty was wishful to thry gettin' it out, but I and her grandmother forbid her, lest she would be pullin' the stones down on herself."

"Yous done right," said Andrew. "Just step back and tell them I'll look in meself as soon as I have the mare fed. Sure, me best plan now," he added as his aunt withdrew, "is to be givin' Kitty the other calf in a prisint, and she might set the more store by it that way."

"Nor you couldn't tell, but you might be ownin' it yourself all the same agin it's much bigger," remarked Mick.

“There’s plenty of things *you* couldn’t tell at any rate,” Andrew said amicably. “Good night to you kindly, and whistle to your dog that’s about follyin’ Terry home. Didn’t I say it was a rael handy storm?”

A CHRISTMAS QUARREL

A CHRISTMAS QUARREL

ROUBLE between the Keoghs and Enrights had been brewing for the best part of a twelve-month before their feelings were wrought to a state of high fermentation which made a crisis quite inevitable. The first beginnings of the process were trivial enough to elude observation ; perhaps the earliest noticeable incident was connected with the trespass of Widdy M'Cormack's goat into the Enrights' premises.

This animal saw fit one breezy spring afternoon to wander off the green, and was presently discovered by Mrs. Enright, wagging his long-horned head with much satisfaction over a fine young cabbage. Finding himself interrupted in his munching, he rose upon his hind legs with such a determined expression that Mrs. Enright paused irresolute, whereupon young Dan Keogh, who was looking over the gate, indiscreetly chuckled. Naturally enough, she turned round on him sharply, and inquired whether he had nothing better to do than to be standing there with an ass's grin on his fool's face, instead of giving her a hand to put the ugly great brute out of destroying every stick in

her garden. Dan, to do him justice, would willingly have helped her, but he could not refrain from replying, "Sure, ma'am, I had a right to be lookin' at it, for it's somethin' off the common"; and, as she was not in a humour for jokes, she peremptorily bade him quit out of her place, himself and his impudence.

As ill-luck would have it, Dan's mother was within hearing of this little dialogue, and she still more peremptorily desired him to come away out of that, and not be meddling with people who had brought up plenty of ignorant, impudent childer of their own. One need hardly say that a certain coolness and stiffness ensued, with every likelihood of long continuance, among the manifold opportunities for giving and taking offence which present themselves in the case of very near neighbours.

For instance, a little later on, Mrs. Keogh and Mrs. Enright became rival exhibitors at a cottage window-garden flower show, which was the means of introducing the beneficial principle of competition into the parish's humble attempts at horticulture. Each of them possessed a thriving plant of scarlet geranium, objects of unalloyed pleasure and pride, until the chance of half a crown, coupled with the honour and glory of prize-winning, caused them to be regarded with more mingled sentiments, as if the beauty of their brilliant blossoms and ivory-banded green leaves were only contingently worth anything after all.

Both owners, it is true, were extremely confident of success ; but this, of course, made Mrs. Keogh's mortification the bitterer on the hot June evening, when she had to trudge home, one of some dozen disappointed women, with her cherished plant insulted by a mere high commendation, while Mrs. Enright's name figured on the prize-list, and the half-crown glistened in Mrs. Enright's hand. That it had got there fairly Mrs. Keogh could not possibly imagine ; and whether she conjectured it to have been gained by slithering the benevolent ladies who acted as judges, or by surreptitiously damaging a neighbour's exhibit, Mrs. Enright's conduct was obviously reprehensible. These and sundry other suspicions could not but produce in Mrs. Keogh's demeanour towards their object a change which Mrs. Enright was quick to perceive and to resent, with effect, from the vantage-ground of her triumph.

Then, again, towards the autumn it chanced that Mr. Shegog's roan mare went lame, and Michael Keogh accused John Enright of having put the story about that this misfortune was due to the unskilful way in which she had been shod by Dinny Fottrell, who had just set up as a blacksmith, he being sister's son to Mrs. Keogh's mother's brother-in-law. Thus it will be perceived that the Keogh-Enright feud was growing steadily more serious, and might well be expected to reach a critical stage by Christmas-time.

But Hugh, the Enrights' youngest son, who lived away up in the county Fermanagh, had no inkling of how things were going on, and was unpleasantly surprised at the state of affairs that he found on his return home for a Christmas holiday. A year ago he had left them all on perfectly amicable terms, and he was puzzled by the grim and glum looks with which any allusions to the Keogh family were met. He hoped at first that it might be only some passing huff ; but his parents' voluble statement of grievances soon showed him that such was not the case. So he made up his mind to a rather dull holiday, since, having no brethren at home, he had counted much on the companionship of the numerous young Keoghs, his contemporaries and former school-fellows. Another cloud lowered on Hugh's Christmas week in the feeble health of his grandfather, who "couldn't be moidhered with the noise of" Hugh's favourite recreation, "fiddling," from which he was therefore debarred indoors.

Beneath the Keoghs' roof, not many perches away, Hugh Enright's return was regarded as likely to bring on an acuter phase of the quarrel ; and it seemed to have actually done so one morning when Michael Keogh declared that "none of them dirty Enrights" should be invited to the Christmas party. The announcement was received with mingled feelings. His wife cordially assented, saying that indeed she'd be long sorry to

see any of the pack darkening her door ; and his sister, Julia Byrne, remarked that she thought John himself might have been “ middling dacint if he hadn’t took and married one of the Colemans.”

But his sons and daughters heard the announcement with some dismay, partly from friendliness towards Hugh, partly from more interested motives. The Keoghs’ Christmas party had long been an important social event in the neighbourhood, and for two or three years past the dance music had been supplied by Hugh Enright, who was considered a great performer. Father M’Queen had averred that he had heard nothing to beat Hugh’s playing at the Munster *Feis* ; and it was rumoured that he had been offered a place worth pounds and pounds a week in some Belfast music-hall. People of a carping turn added that Hugh spent a power of time over his bowing and scraping, and made as much fuss over his fiddle—and it a plain-looking one enough—as if it was a living Christian ; but nobody could charge him with giving himself airs about his accomplishment, or deny that he was always as ready to play for the pleasure of some child, or poor old body, as to show off before a more critically appreciative audience.

And now the loss of his services threatened the Keoghs’ entertainment with nothing less than disaster. For, though the parish did contain, in the persons of Bill Tierney and Terry the Trotter, two other musicians of far inferior powers, neither

of these was just then to be had, and a party without dancing seemed to the young Keoghs very little better than dancing without music.

The father thought differently. He had always been a sedate sort of man, disposed "for other than for dancing measures," and he now said that when they had a good fire on the hearth, and their plenty of whisky and tay, it was a queer thing if they couldn't contrive to divert themselves asking riddles and telling stories without cutting capers into the bargain. At all events they'd have to try.

Their mother, while entirely approving of the Enrights' exclusion, retained a livelier recollection of her youthful tastes, and sympathized with Rose and Molly and Larry and Dan in their disappointment. She opined that himself had a right to hire a proper fiddler over from Ballynavore, "the way the childer might have their bit of fun, and them Enrights needn't be settin' themselves up wid the notion they were hinderin' anybody of doin' whatever they had a mind to, and no thanks to them, or the likes of them." But himself only hoped ironically that they'd all be getting their healths until he was ould ape enough to spend three or four half-crowns on fetching a man over from the other end of the county to play jigs for a couple of hours ; and the question seemed to be most unsatisfactorily settled.

At the last moment, however, fortune did them a kindly turn. On the afternoon of St. Stephen's

Day, only a few hours before the party was to begin, there appeared in the village a strange old fiddler, whose playing delighted all his hearers. Less prepossessing was his aspect, as he limped along in a ragged great-coat, with a battered, broad-brimmed caubeen surmounting a tangle of fuzzy grey locks, and shading one black-patched eye. But his musical gifts fully counterbalanced all such defects, and his rendering of the "Minstrel Boy" caused the best-qualified connoisseurs in Kildonagh to pronounce Hugh Enright himself a fool to him on the fiddle.

It was promptly ascertained that his services for the evening could be secured on strictly moderate terms, and the young Keoghs rushed home rejoicing to report the lucky chance. Their father at first demurred. Was it to be having in a tramp off the road, from goodness knows where, that as like as not, would walk off with anything he could lay hands on, if he didn't burn the house down on them, or do murder on them all in their beds? Troth and bedad, they might put that notion out of their heads. But the young folk pleaded desperately against the throwing away of this providential opportunity, and were backed up by their mother's forecasts of "them Enrights'" malicious glee over the precluded dance.

So when Dan proceeded to urge that if robbing and thieving was what the poor man was up to, he wouldn't be very apt to be sitting playing away for

next door to half an hour in the police barracks, and went on to quote the ponderous sergeant's saying that the music made him feel fit to dance a jig in heavy marching order, old Keogh veiled his surrender in a jest, declaring that if Sergeant Molloy was talking of dancing, they'd better throw a few hundredweight of stones on top of their rick, for fear it might take a fancy to be giving a few odd leps as well.

The Keoghs' party went off grandly, and the stranger's fiddling contributed largely to its success. All agreed that no music equal to it had ever been heard in the parish, and Mrs. Keogh thought that if Hugh Enright was there it might put him out of conceit with his own scraping, he had such an opinion of, while the master of the house could not but allow that the fiddler was "a quiet, dacint ould crathur," sitting unobtrusively in a corner, with his hat slouched to keep the light from his unlucky weak eye, and refusing to emerge even for refreshments. It would have been a pity, after all, if the young gabies had missed their bit of diversion, old Keogh reflected, as he watched the bobbing heads through a flickering glow.

Towards the end of breakfast next morning his family saw him suddenly look disconcerted, and begin to fumble rapidly through all his pockets. Then he jumped up and examined his suit of best clothes, hung behind the door, and finally he sped out into the yard, where the car stood under its

shed, with his heavy great-coat lying on the top of the well. When the others followed him, with shouted questions, to which he was flurry-deaf, they found him diving into the depths of this garment, "and he all of a tremble, and crawkin' to himself like a hin wid the quinsy," as his sister afterwards reported. "It's gone," he said, "I'm ruined—me leather pouch—somebody's took it on me."

He had good cause to be dismayed, for the pouch contained notes to the value of over thirty pounds, which he had drawn out of the bank the day before, driving into Cornishtown on purpose, that he might buy some young stock at the big Drumallin Fair next week. The loss would mean the destruction of the whole year's farming plans.

"I had it in a pocket of that," he said, "drivin' home last night, and I actually had me hand on it out here to bring it indoors wid me, when I was called away to some fooling or the other, and it went clane out of me head till just this minyit. And it's took on me."

Of course much agitated hunting and ransacking followed, accompanied by many conjectures and speculations. One of these was offered by Julia Byrne. "Ne'er a wonder I'd wonder," she said to her brother, "if it was that ould strange fiddlin' fellow. I'd no great opinion of lettin' him in here, and no more had you yourself, Michael, at the beginnin'." But he requested her not to be talking

foolish. "Sure hadn't I me hand on it the very minyit before me comin' into the house, and there he was scrapin' away in the corner, and never stirred beyond it till I ped him his two shillings, and let him out at the gate meself, that I locked after him. Whoever else it might be, I'll take me oath it wasn't him."

"I'll tell you who it's a dale liker to be," said Mrs. Keogh. "That young thief of the world, Hugh Enright. I seen him slinkin' about the yard gate not so very long before you came home; and, what's more, I was torminted the whole evenin' wid that ugly little yella dog of his runnin' in at the door whenever it would be open. You might remember, Larry, me biddin' you put it out a couple of times. And if that isn't a sign of Hugh himself bein' somewherees about the place, I dunno what else it was."

"Begorrah, then, I mind now noticin' it meself," said her husband, "and wonderin' what brought it. To be sure it come after that young miscreant. I'll just step down to the barracks and see what the sargin has to say to it. And I'll go before Mr. Sullivan and get a summons agin these Enrights, and a search-warrant—bedad will I."

"You'd do right to make all the haste you can," said Mrs. Keogh, "for you couldn't tell the instant he might slip off out of this country, and then you might whistle jigs for your money. His mother has raison to be proud of him, herself and her big

lump of a geranium. Maybe it's a prize for pick-pockets she might have a good chance of gettin' next time."

"The mischief's in it all, Molly," Dan Keogh whispered, drawing his sister aside. "It'll be the death of ould Jimmy Enright if they bring the polis landin' into the house wid any talk of takin' up Hugh. But you might as aisy stop the win' blowin' as himself there of stumpin' off hotfut to the barracks, and the divil knows where else."

Molly, in reply, whispered to him more mysteriously, and at greater length. "So run for your life," she ended, and Dan darted out of doors.

A few minutes afterwards, when Michael Keogh had just got into his best clothes, which he considered due to so grave an occasion, and while everybody else was scurrying about, and seeking and lamenting, who should come up the road, with a hasty and intermittent hobble, but last night's old fiddler. He was followed, at a discreet distance, by Dan and the yellow terrier. Rose ran up to him, looking panic-stricken, and began to warn him off the premises; but Molly pulled her back, bidding her whisht for a stronsach, and at the same moment their father bustled out.

"Good day, me man," he said, passing on hastily. "But you needn't be stoppin' here. We want no music this mornin', and be hanged to the whole of it."

The fiddler was limping away, lamer than ever, but Molly again interposed. "Whip th'ould caubeen off you," she said. "Make haste and slip out of the ould coat."

"Is it diminted you are, Molly?" the fiddler said in a surprised undertone, "and your father right forenint us?"

"Och, no matter for that; do as I bid you, and quit play-actin'," said Molly.

As the fiddler halted perplexed, Dan, stepping behind him, snatched off the slouched hat, and with it a fringe of grizzled grey hair and a long beard. "Whoo-oo-murdher; you had me choked only for the string breakin'," howled the fiddler. "What are you at at all?"

"Me sowl to glory, and is it Hugh Enright it is?" said Michael Keogh, arrested by the spectacle in the midst of his perturbation. "Whethen now, and who was in it last night?"

"Sure you see 'twas just himself, father honey," said Molly. "The same that you found fiddlin' away in the corner when you come in. A bit of a joke it was that we made up among the whole of us."

Her father's unbiased opinion of the joke will now never be known, for before he could express one, his son Larry came rushing round the house-corner, waving aloft some small object. "He's got it," all the family exclaimed, with a general gasp of relief.

"And where was it, Larry, avic, in the name of goodness?" said Michael Keogh, grasping the pouch with an eager hand, and gloating over its familiar aspect, endeared by an hour of dread.

"Well now, you might be lookin' for it long enough," said Larry, "and it lyin' in a crack between the oat-bin and the wall."

"Was it so?" said his father solemnly. "Then I left it out of me hand when I went to fetch the mare her feed, and it slipped off wid the led openin' and shuttin'."

"Bedad, it's a lucky thing Larry had the wit to be lookin' there," said Julia Byrne.

"Och, 'twas just a chance," said Larry modestly.

"All right they are, anyhow," Michael Keogh said, swiftly shuffling his notes, while his quenched plans shot up again like fire. In the glamour of them everything looked praiseworthy, and he said, "Well, Hugh, me lad, how's yourself? 'Twas the fine fools you made of us last night, but the tunes were grand. We were all of us sayin' so this mornin'—weren't we, Biddy?"

There was a rather awful pause, for everybody felt that much must turn upon what Mrs. Keogh would say.

She said, "Indeed we were so. And what way is your poor grandfather this mornin', Hughey? We couldn't be throublin' your father and mother to be comin' out last night, knowin' he was so poorly in himself; but I was just about steppin'

over now to try would he by any chance fancy a cup of beautiful thick milk, or a drop of limonade."

And in this reply everybody recognized the preliminaries to peace.

THE CLOCK AND THE COCK

THE CLOCK AND THE COCK*

IF anybody had been making an inventory, which would have been by no means a long one, of the Widow Corcoran's possessions, he might well have set down a very strong will of her own as first in order of importance. So it appeared, at any rate, to her daughter Grace, who had lived all her days under its dominion. Meekly and acquiescently she had lived as a rule, but exceptions of course occurred, and it was one of these that sent her speeding off on a wet summer afternoon to consult her friend Molly Keary, in an anxious mood. A rebellious mood it would have been too, had experience allowed her to see any prospect of successfully rebelling ; as things were, however, her only hopes lay in some sort of strategy, and it was with a view to obtaining counsel and suggestions that she had bethought her of Molly. The Kearys lived a good step away, although they were by far her nearest neighbours in that direction ; others she had none, except old Mrs. Starkie, whose house was a little bit down the road in the opposite one, and who being an unsociable and eccentric person

* In Irish country places the people often estimate the time of day by cock-crow.

did not count for much. This dearth of company made Grace prize any small gaieties that offered themselves to her more than she would have done had she grown up less out of their reach ; and it was partly the reason why she was so keen about the Glendougal *Feis* (musical festival). Not that this entertainment, with its songs and dances and bands and prizes, was not really quite grand enough to appear important and attractive in the eyes even of people who had no lack of such pleasures to make them uncritical. At any rate she had set her heart upon it entirely, and apparently with every likelihood of attaining to it, until now within a week of the great day, an unlooked-for difficulty had arisen. What its nature was, and how seriously it threatened, will appear from her conversation with Molly, whom she found feeding ducks at the Kearys' back door.

“Och, Molly,” her communication began, “what do you suppose *Herself above there* has took into her head now ?”

As Molly had often listened to such a statement of grievances, she well knew who “*Herself above there*” was, and replied sympathetically, “What at all ?”

“Not a foot, she says, will she start on Saturday mornin’ till eight o’clock. Plenty of time, she says, that’ll give us to catch the half-past nine train at Clonlough. But sure our ould ass takes every minyit of two hours goin’ that far, so what chance in

the world have we of catchin' it? And ne'er another one before the afternoon; we might as well be stoppin' at home as thravellin' on it, for every-thing'd be over by the time we get there."

"Well now, that's rael contrary," said Molly. "Couldn't you come along wid us? We'll be startin' early enough, you may depind, and we could aisy conthrive room for you on the car."

"Bedad could we," said Molly's brother Larry, poking his head suddenly out from behind the water-barrel. "I'd leg it over the hills meself wid a heart and a half, if 'twould be any convenience."

"I wouldn't be let," Grace said ruefully. "When I passed a remark about the ass walkin' slow, she said that if I consaited meself too fine for the cart, I might keep out of it, but in it we'd go or not at all. She's as proud of that little ould yoke, when she's sittin' cocked up in it, as if she was the Queen of Sheba on wheels," Grace averred bitterly. "So what's to become of our four-handed reel, and our part-song?" For Grace was not to be merely a spectator at this musical festival, but was to take part in the singing and dancing competitions, practising for which had lent an aim and an interest to many a long summer day.

Molly meditated for a while perplexedly as she watched the gobbling ducks. Then she said hopefully, "What 'ud ail you to not put your clock on a good bit forrader that mornin'? I wouldn't wonder if that was your best plan."

“ Land’s sake, Molly, I might as well offer to put on the sun in the sky ! Sure that ould clock’s one of the greatest panjandrums she has. A weeny padlock she keeps on the glass over the face of it, the way nobody only herself can be makin’ or meddlin’ wid it. I couldn’t get to lay a finger on the hands, if it was to set back the Day of Judg-ment.”

“ Maybe you could stop it altogether,” said Molly. “ I know it goes wid a penjilam, and them sort’s aisy to stop. Just give it a slant crooked. And then among us all we could be persuadin’ her ‘twas the wrong time.”

“ Not an atom could we,” Grace said despondently. “ She’d be apt to notice it the very first instant it left off tickin’, and start it agin ; and if she didn’t, she’d just go by Mrs. Starkie’s eight o’clock cock. She has a great opinion of him too. I’ve known her regulate the clock by him. The big, long-legged one he is, and eight’s his time ever. You might hear the bawls of him at Clonlough. So we’d be none the better off.”

“ It’s twinty pities that Mrs. Starkie doesn’t own a six o’clock one,” said Molly ; “ me mother’s sister had, I mind, over at Cahirlyn, but I don’t know of e'er another on this country-side.” Molly had apparently come to an end of her resources.

“ Look you here, Grace,” Larry said, his rough black head in its small cloth cap reappearing round the barrel, “ do you stop the clock, and I’ll mind

the cock. And if you want to know how you'll stop it so as it won't go on again—just put a few dabs of glue, or treckle, or anythin' sticky, on the end of a fine knittin'-needle, and poke it in at the hole the penjilam hangs out of. That'll clog the works, and sorra a tick there'll be in it, till she's got it cleaned at Matt Grogan's over beyant."

Grace looked doubtfully at Larry. She had never been accustomed to think highly of his capabilities, and only that in the present emergency she could not afford to despise any offers of assistance, she would no doubt now have summarily rejected his advice. But as it was she said, "And how about the cock?"

"Och, lave that to me," said Larry. "Put a spoke in the wheels of the ould clock, and don't delay too long doin' it; about Wednesday evenin' might be the best time. And I'll make a job of the cock."

Larry's tone had a confidence with which he did not inspire either of his hearers. His sister said, "A quare job it's apt to be, if you get meddlin' with other people's fowls"; and Grace, in duty bound, backed her up with, "'Twould be no thing to go do."

"What talk have you of meddlin'?" said Larry. "And 'twould be the best thing to do at all, for 'twould set you joggin' off to the town in lashins of time to catch the train, and as much as you please over."

This did indeed sound tempting to eager Grace ; still she was unconvinced, and remained so, although Larry walked half-way home with her, enlarging upon the merits of his plan, the details of which he refused to divulge.

Her incredulity was due partly to the poor opinion of Larry's capacities which she shared with, and in some measure had learned from, his brethren, who regarded him rather as an omadhawn ; and partly to a belief that began to spring up in her mind about Larry's elder brother Dan, who was generally considered a much smarter youth. She would certainly see Dan to-morrow after Mass, and she said to herself that he would more than probably be able to devise some way out of her difficulty. "He might have a chance of persuadin' me mother. I've heard her say that he was a sinsible lad." That Dan had a strong wish to stand in her good graces she did not doubt at all, and she was right enough there. Her mistake lay in assuming that it would make him zealous about helping her to the *Feis*. For, as a matter of fact, any such effect was completely counteracted by another wish of his, that pulled in the opposite direction. This latter was a negative sort of aspiration, and might have been expressed in the statement that "he'd as lief Paddy Byrne had somebody else for a partner except Grace Corcoran in their ould reel." Dan, who stood over six feet, and weighed over twelve stone, did not excel in dancing, and was disposed to depreciate the accom-

plishment. Though he knew that Grace looked forward to the entertainment, he by no means realized what importance it had for her; but in any case to suppress his own likings or dislikings in favour of another person's was never a habit with Dan. The knowledge that Grace would give her eyes to go would not have hindered him from jumping at a chance to keep her at home.

Thus it came about that on their way back from Mass next morning Grace overheard a bit of conversation between her mother and Dan Keary which filled her with wrath and dismay.

Said Mrs. Corcoran, "I'm intendin' to set out at eight o'clock on Saturday. Wouldn't you say our Bessy'll take us over plenty time enough in the cart? The rest of them will have it that we had a right to be flouncin' off before the night's out of the sky. But all we'd gain by that 'ud be sittin' waitin' till one's head's moidhered in the station full of screechin' engines."

To which Dan, instead of saying cautiously, "Well now, ma'am, my own opinion is you'd be safer startin' a trifle earlier. It's a long step to Clonlough, and a heavy pull up Quillan Hill. If it was me, I wouldn't start later than half-past seven," and so forth, actually replied, "Aye, bedad, ma'am, that's lavin' yourself aisy thravellin'. Sure there's no sinse in tormintin' yourself to get ready half an hour too soon. It's the best of it you'll have, ma'am, widout hurryin' for nothin'."

Grace could hardly believe her ears. Being very young and simple-minded, she did not surmise his real motive, and could account for his conduct only by supposing the densest stupidity or most wanton malice. The alternatives so enraged her that when parting company at the Kearys' house she would hardly speak a word to Dan, and would not "look the way he was" at all. Dan, who had not much imagination, could not explain this by any manner of means, and wondered what it was that had put Grace Corcoran into such a cross temper.

All the rest of that day Grace brooded over the contrariness of her mother, and the worse than good-for-nothingness of Dan. But before nightfall she had begun to mingle with her hard thoughts of them a feeling of indignation against herself for having disdainfully refused to consider Larry's proffered help. She reproached herself with ingratitude towards him, saying, "Sure, poor Larry's very good-natured ; anything he could do he would do," and with imprudence, saying, "Sure, there might be some sinse in whatever plan he had all the while. Anyway, it's long before he'd make such a gaby of himself as that big, mischievous bosthoon Dan Keary's after doin' this mornin', and bad luck to him."

The certainty of Dan's folly or wickedness appeared somehow to increase the probability of Larry's having sense, and by the time that Tuesday came, Grace, grown desperate, could espy no glim-

mier of hope except in such a possibility. Therefore meeting him, not quite accidentally, at the pool where he was watering the Kearys' old cream-coloured pony, she approached the subject point-blank by asking him whether he could give her some sort of sticky stuff to put in the works of the clock. Larry was undoubtedly very good-natured indeed. He fell in with her new views immediately, without once alluding to her former rejection of his scheme, which was more than many people would have had the self-denial to refrain from doing. Likewise he took a good deal of trouble to procure for her a lump of soft putty, and to show her how it might best be introduced into the clock-case. It is true that he persisted in refusing to explain how he proposed to deal with the cock, which left room for alarming speculations and conjectures. Still almost any of them seemed more tolerable than the prospect of that long, crawling, belated drive into Clonlough, which haunted her day and night. Many a feverish dream she had of creeping up an endless Quillan Hill, with the sound in her ears of the engine panting away out of the station. So she only expressed to Larry a hope that he "wouldn't be doin' anythin' outrageous"; and Larry only replied, "Outrageous be jiggered!" which did not greatly reassure her.

However, as no other possible expedient presented itself, she could but hope for the best, and execute her part of the plot discreetly and warily. By

Larry's advice she stopped the clock late on the Thursday evening, which, as he said, was neither running it too close, nor yet leaving Herself time to be borrowing or mending on them. The putty worked well, and next morning Mrs. Corcoran in much perturbation vainly shook and poked, while Grace looked on with deep anxiety and some twinges of remorse. Soon afterwards Larry stepped over to see if she had been successful, and when he was satisfied upon this point, he thought fit to trust her with his own plans.

"I'll tell you what way I'm thinkin' to manage," he said, "it's changin' the cocks I'll be."

"And how at all?" said Grace.

"Och, aisy enough. Sure I'm after takin' a streeel round through the place these last few mornin's early, and there's Long Peter Sullivan's wife, a bit over beyant Dunbeg, owns a grand little white cock, that let's a few screeches out of it, fit to wake the kingdom of Connaught, at seven o'clock every day of its life. So my notion is to be just borryin' the loan of it for to-night, and letting it roost con-vanient in Mrs. Starkie's yard, and puttin' her own ould cock out of the way somewherees, or else they'll get fightin'. And then divil a throuble will you have about settin' off in good time, for your mother'll never misdoubt that it isn't the eight o'clock cock she hears crowin'—the sound of them is as like as if they come out of the one egg—and joggin' along she'll be, and consaitin' she's doin' the

very thing she had a mind to. So everybody'll be pleased."

"Deed now, Larry, if you can conthrive it that way, we'll do grand," said Grace.

"Conthrive it I will, no fear," said Larry, "if we've any sort of luck. Unbeknownst I'll have to do it at both ends ; for ould Mrs. Starkie's as cross as a weasel ever, and ourselves and the Sullivans isn't over-frindly these times, that's a trifle unhandy. But I'll get a holt of the little cock, very cautious, overnight ; and first thing to-morra, wanst it's crowed its crow, back I'll skyte wid it across the fields to Dunbeg, that's on me shortest way to the station, and slip it into their place afore ever they miss it. And if the worst come to the worst, I could make a shift to give a few cock-a-doodle meself might take her in right enough. To tell you the truth, I was tryin' it a good while yesterday above on the hill ; you'd think it was practisin' for the *Feis* I was. Och, Grace, 'twill be great entirely hearin' you singin' and dancin'. Well I'd like to be in Paddy Byrne's eot, but bedad it's meself 'ud look the quare show, flourishin' up on a platform to cut capers before all the people. You wouldn't give thank you for the likes of such a partner."

"If it wasn't only for you, I'm not very apt to be there at all," Grace said, evading this point, "and you're takin' a dale of trouble over it."

"Trouble the other way round," said Larry.

Next morning, to Grace's joyful relief, everything

went smoothly as Larry had predicted. The shrill crow from Mrs. Starkie's fowl-shed took Mrs. Corcoran by surprise, and put her in a flurry to start as she supposed only just in time. But as Grace had unostentatiously made all preparations for departure, they got off a very few minutes past seven, which left a comfortable margin for the dawdling of old Bessy the ass. As they climbed the hill by Mrs. Starkie's steep field, Grace caught a glimpse of Larry Keary running across it with something under his arm, whereby she knew he must have successfully restored the exiled eight o'clock cock, which had spent the night in close captivity, and was bound for Dunbeg to replace the Sullivans' involuntary loan.

Steadily they jogged along without adventure, until they reached the entrance to Dunbeg Lane, fully half-way to Clonlough. From this lane emerged a middle-aged woman in a brown shawl.

"Judy Dempsey it is," said Mrs. Corcoran, and chucked Bessy to stand still.

Mrs. Dempsey had a concerned and puzzled air, for which she accounted as follows: "I'm just after comin' round Long Peter Sullivan's place, and who should I see there at the gate but himself, and the wife, and young Larry Keary, and one of the police constables, all of them argufyin' together, and to the best of my belief the Sullivans was chargin' the young chap wid stealin' their fowls. Makin' off wid a little white cock of theirs, Peter said he

caught him, and ne'er a much he seemed to have to say for himself. Rael took aback he looked. Sure now, ma'am, that's a quare thing for to happen, for accordin' to my knowledge the Kearys was always very dacint, respectable people, and I never heard tell of any such doin's in their family."

"Nor anybody else either," said Mrs. Corcoran, "and they next-door neighbours to us all the days of our lives. Larry Keary stealin' chuckens! Troth and bedad, ma'am, it's the quare turn you're after givin' me."

But at that moment Grace gave her a still quarer one by suddenly jumping out of the cart and rushing off down the lane. "Saints above!" her mother called after her, "what at all's took you now?"

Grace did not stay to explain. Her mind was wholly occupied by the thought that Larry had "got into trouble wid the polis"—a very terrible thing in her eyes—on her account, and that she must do what she could to extricate him. Down the muddy lane she ran, forgetting the train, and the *Feis*, and her new green and white skirt, and presently she came upon just the group that Judy Dempsey had described. There, sure enough, were Larry and the constable, and the two Sullivans looking "as bitter as sut." The fact was that Larry when approaching their fowl-shed with the white cock under his arm had suddenly espied Mrs. Sullivan close by, whereupon, losing his presence of mind, he had precipitately fled, and, as

ill luck would have it, had bolted up against her husband ; while, to make bad worse, Constable Garvey, early abroad in quest of sheep-hunting dogs, had arrived exactly in time to receive what sounded a highly suspicious report of Larry's proceedings.

Probably the Sullivans would not in any case have pushed the matter to extremities ; however, the arrival on the scene of pretty Grace Corcoran with her eager and somewhat incoherent exculpations did certainly create a timely diversion, and helped to give things a pleasanter aspect.

“Ah, Maggie, stick the crathur in the shed, and stop blatherin’,” was Peter’s conclusion of the affair. “Faix, yourself’s the lucky lad, young Keary, that has a fine sweetheart to keep you out of mischief.” And he went off jocularly with the constable.

Larry and Grace stood looking at one another.

“Och, Grace, asthore,” Larry said, “I wonder are you e'er such a thing at all ?”

“How should *I* know,” said Grace, “when yourself doesn’t ?”

“Oh bedad, if that’s all,” said Larry, “right well I know, glory be to goodness !” And thus their “coortin’” was begun and finished.

They were still standing in the middle of the lane, and wondering at the discovery that they were actually sweethearts, when shrill shrieks arose close by. The fact was that Mrs. Corcoran, pursuing her daughter down the rough and narrow

track, had driven over a heap of stones, and "tilted the whole concern body and bones into the ditch." Its extrication took them such a long time that their train meanwhile started, with a compartment full of Kearys speculating about the cause of their delay. And so it happened that Grace never got to the Glendougal *Feis* after all. Still, her day had brought a great event, with which she and Larry were quite satisfied, as were, on the whole, their respective families, except, it may be, Dan, who soon afterwards went to the States. This incident of the clock and the cock had perhaps cost him a partner no less than Paddy Byrne.

THE LITTLE HOUSE

THE LITTLE HOUSE

WHILE Rosanne Nolan was waiting at Windy Gap for Connolly's car to pass, who should come along the road but Con the Quare One. All the spring he had been roving on a wide round, so that it was longer than usual since she had seen the fantastic-looking little old man, with his frosted dark hair, and small, fine face, which at times bore traces of his life's tragedy, when a wildness in his blue eyes justified the general opinion that pronounced him "a trifle asthray." This morning, however, they glanced shrewdly at Rosanne, standing there in her best attire, which added shoes, stockings, and a sailor hat to her usual red woollen skirt and grey shawl. In one hand she held her luggage, which consisted of a battered market-basket. "So it's travellin' away wid yourself you are, alanna?" he said.

"'Deed am I," Rosanne replied, "to stay wid me aunt over at Ballymacclone."

She pronounced the name with some pride, because Ballymacclone was nearly fifty miles distant, and in her seventeen years she had very seldom journeyed half so far, and never alone; a fact which

gave much novelty and importance to the expedition. Journeys can, of course, be but roughly measured by miles. Fifty of these may involve hardly a short hour's whirl on rails, or a couple of long days' slow plodding on foot.

In Rosanne's case Ballymacclone had to be reached by a jogging on side-cars, which would last from noon till sunset at least ; so that she was entitled to regard her enterprise as one of considerable magnitude.

"They'll be missin' you over there," he said, looking across the narrow valley, which runs like a river of grass between two broad purple-brown sweeps of moorland. Just opposite, on the edge of a slope, with a streak of road before it, gleamed a white speck of a cottage, tiny, and dwindled by half a mile's distance ; there was no other in sight.

"Ah, sure, me mother has Aunt Cassie for company," said Rosanne ; "and the house is small enough for two people, let alone three."

"There does be more room somewhile in little houses than in big ones," said Con. But Rosanne considered the remark to be merely the sort of foolishness you might expect from Con, and need not notice ; which was, indeed, commonly his neighbours' assumption when any of his sayings puzzled them, or did not fall in with their own views.

Rosanne thought very badly of small houses, which was unfortunate, as she had to live in one

that could hardly have been smaller, consisting of a kitchen and a diminutive bedroom. Its scanty space, smoky gloom, and earthen floor had never ceased to aggrieve her since, half a dozen years ago, she had come to it from a more commodious dwelling. Her father, the ne'er-do-well son of a fairly prosperous tenant farmer, had married "to disoblige his family," his wife being only a labourer's daughter, with whom they declined to have "any doings or dealings."

But when this unchancy Felix very soon afterwards died, his mother had so far relented as to offer his infant Rosanne a home, and his young widow could not afford to refuse. Accordingly, Rosanne had spent her first ten or eleven years in a comfortable large cottage among the soft green pastures of a southern county; and she found the contrast strangely unpleasant when her grandmother's death, and her uncle's disinclination to burden himself with his improvident brother's superfluous daughter, compelled her to change them for a mud cabin on the edge of a bog away in the rugged west.

There her mother and a maiden aunt had been making their livelihood with much difficulty, which was not lessened by the arrival of little Rosanne. For, though she was, in her Aunt Cassie's opinion, "a hardy lump of a child, and well able to be lendin' a hand wid pickin' stones and carryin' turf," Rosanne herself had neither training nor taste for

field-work, and her mother "thought bad of puttin' hardship on the crathur."

As time went on and she grew up strong and sturdy, while her mother's health declined, Rosanne did take a share in the tasks entailed by their potato-patch and poultry and turf-stack ; but she never became really reconciled to the life, or lost a sense that she had come down in the world. Moreover, rather frequent fallings out with her bustling Aunt Cassie helped to increase her chronic dissatisfaction.

She had been well pleased, therefore, at the arrival of this invitation from her mother's much more thriving married sister, the mistress of quite a grand hardware shop in Ballymacclone beyond Lisbarney, who kindly wished to give poor Molly's fatherless girl a chance of seeing a bit of the world. Aunt Cassie had grumbled slightly, but as there was really little to be done in the slack summer season, before the potato-digging, and as Mrs. Brady had thoughtfully sent Rosanne's fare on the long-car, no grounds for effectual opposition appeared. So here was Rosanne waiting for the Wogans' promised loan of a lift as far as Kildrum, in no mood to agree with Con's implied praise of little houses. "I'd liefer be livin' in a big one, anyhow," she said.

"Well, me child, I wouldn't wonder if you were so, one of these days, sorra a bit would I," Con said encouragingly, "only don't be stoppin' away too long this time. There's the whitethorn," he

said, pointing to the bush by which they stood, where the blossom had withered into a dusky pinkish cinnamon, "it's after turnin' the colour of a chaffinch's breast ; that's a sign ever of the summer beginnin', and you'd a right to be travellin' home again before the haws on it do be as red as a robin's, for then we're widin a stone's throw of the winter."

"Ah sure I'll be back again twice over agin that," Rosanne declared, adding, nevertheless, in her own mind that the longer her absence lasted the better would she be pleased.

But if she had only known, even at that moment, circumstances were arising to make her speedy return seem very probable indeed.

For shortly before the mail-car was due in Ballymacrone market-place, an anxious-faced young woman came across it, and midway met with a portly, jolly-looking, middle-aged woman, who, to judge by the heap of luggage piled beside her, was also on her travels. "Well, Eily Brady," she said, "here am I just arrived. And what's the best good news with you ?"

"Bad's the best," the young woman replied dolefully. "Sure, Miss Hegarty, we're after gettin' a quare upset. Dr. Egan says it's the scarlatina our Joe's sickenin' with—he's ailin' since yesterday—and here's me cousin Rosanne Nolan landin' in to stop wid us on the next car. Of course, we can't be takin' her in belike to get her death. So I run over to try is there any way she could get

back to her own place this evenin', and if not I must contrive her a night's lodging somewhere in the town. 'Twill be a heavy disappointment to the girl I should suppose."

Eily supposed truly. When the long-car soon afterwards rattled up, Rosanne alighted, to be at once dazzled by the slanted western beams, and bewildered by the abrupt darkening of her prospects. Her cousin's hurried explanations made clear to her mind only the fact that she must convey herself home again with the least possible delay, an overthrow of her hopes which seemed extremely deplorable. Miss Hegarty, looking on sympathetically, saw an expression of blank chagrin extinguish, fog-like, all the brightness in the young, eager face, and the sight stirred a kindly impulse.

"Let the girl come with me, Eily; I'm stoppin' the night with Mrs. Rayner, that would put up the two of us as soon as one. And to-morrow I'm goin' to me own place, where I'll be glad of her company. It's too bad to be packin' her off again that way, like a returned order, sent on approval."

And thus it was actually settled. Eily was so much relieved at getting rid of the responsibility for Rosanne, that she made no demur, and Rosanne felt that it would be far more tolerable to adventure herself with this good-natured seeming stranger, than to travel tamely back to the door of the little house, seeing nothing livelier before her than an occasional squabble with Aunt Cassie.

As for Miss Julia Hegarty, second thoughts brought her no inclination to repent of her hasty act, though it was certainly inconsistent with a line of conduct upon which she had lately been resolving. She had indeed sufficient reason to be well satisfied with things in general, for a few weeks back she had most unexpectedly inherited from a distant relative a good bit of land, and "a real genteel residence," at no great distance from Ballymacrone; and she was just now setting off to take possession of her new property.

Even before it accrued to her, she had belonged to a social grade somewhat higher than that of people in such a small way of business as the Bradys, and she had considered that this would be a convenient opportunity for withdrawing from all inappropriate acquaintanceships. Yet here she was going out of her way to associate herself with a girl who clearly could be nothing more than a poor relation of these undesirable Bradys. However, the good nature which had prompted her was proof against all grudging reflections, and would probably have been so, even if it had not found an ally in her vanity.

Rosanne's genuine and undisguised admiration of all the fine things with which she was now for the first time brought into contact did gratify and flatter Miss Hegarty. The outspoken wonder at the beauty of her huge rose-garlanded hat transfigured it in her eyes; she even enjoyed the

otherwise rather despicable bacon and eggs at supper, because her companion so evidently regarded them as rare luxuries.

On the morrow, when another long-car conveyed them to a house half villa, half farm, with its bow-windows and flower-beds, as well as its sheds and ricks, set in a patchwork of its own green fields, Rosanne could hardly believe that she was really to reside amid such splendour. Several days slipped by without wearing the edge off her wonder at it all. She did not write home, saying to herself that her Ballymacclone aunt would surely do so, but thinking the while that her mother might disapprove of the changed plans, and recall her if apprised of them. As she knew nothing of the country round about her mother's door beyond the radius of the small circle described by her walks, she was unaware that in driving to Miss Hegarty's house she traversed a road running parallel, at a short distance, to that on which she had travelled the day before ; nor did she guess that actually less than ten miles now separated her from her own poor little dwelling.

Knowledge of this fact would, no doubt, have sorely distressed her ; the one serious flaw in her pleasure being an anxiety to conceal from Miss Hegarty, and still more from Miss Hegarty's maid, how extremely humble was the abode of which she grew daily more ashamed. Her constant dread was that she might bring about the mortifying

revelation by some indiscreet speech ; but she picked her words carefully, and when one day she found herself on the verge of discovery, it was through no inadvertence of her own.

She had started in high spirits to share with her hostess the dignity and diversion of a drive on a private outside-car, and the fine summer morning tempted them to prolong their jaunt mile after mile. At last, as they trotted on, Rosanne began to feel the aspect of the country growing vaguely familiar, and presently she perceived, with a shock of dismay, that beyond a doubt they were approaching her own village.

So unmistakable grew the landmarks that she could with difficulty imagine them unknown to her companions. It was a terrible situation, and she could do nothing to avert its dangers except timidly suggest that Bobby, the horse, might be getting tired. But Miss Hegarty, to her disappointment, said cheerfully, "Ah, not at all ; he's as fit as a fiddler," and bade the driver jog along a bit further. "What's this place we're comin' to ?" she inquired of him, and, though he did not know, Rosanne expected every moment that he would stop to ask some passer-by, and probably bring about a most embarrassing recognition.

Her state of helpless apprehension became almost sheer despair, when, skirting the edge of the moorland, the car turned into that dreaded steep and

narrow lane where the little white cabin stood, no bigger than Miss Hegarty's cart-shed.

While the car crawled up the hill Rosanne felt certain that her mother or her aunt would come rushing to the door, and overwhelm her with confusion. But, as luck would have it, they jolted slowly, slowly by, without beholding any live thing except the lame speckled hen and the smaller pig. Even Mick, the collie, whose greetings might have been awkwardly affectionate, was nowhere visible. Accordingly Larry had begun to chirrup to Bobby at the top of the hill, and Rosanne to breathe freely in the belief that she had after all escaped, when she heard with horror a familiar call, and saw her Aunt Cassie running along by the dyke, and beckoning as she ran.

"Stop, Larry, there's some one screeching to us," said his mistress. "I declare now, I think it's yourself she's calling, Rosanne."

"Sure how could it be at all?" Rosanne said desperately. "It's just some ould crazy body."

"She is so," said Larry, who was hungry and impatient of delays. "'Tis only annoyin' you she'd be."

"Och, then drive on wid you," said Miss Hegarty, and Rosanne's hope once more revived, this time not to be crushed again.

Yet the shadow thrown by the discovery did not lift. From thenceforward not only did she feel herself continually tottering on the brink of detec-

tion, but she could never think how she could in any case get home without divulging where she lived. Sooner or later the fact must come to the knowledge of Miss Hegarty's household, and her own denial would have only made the matter worse.

Moreover, through all this time of perplexity pricked an uneasy conjecture about what her Aunt Cassie had been making such frantic efforts to tell her. Suppose there was something amiss? Her mother maybe ill. It was no wonder that Miss Hegarty noticed her young guest to have "grown moped like, and down-looking all of a sudden. Whatever had took her?"

A few days afterwards Miss Hegarty went to bargain with a neighbour about the sale of a standing meadow, and Rosanne, who had not accompanied her, by and by sauntered down to the road-gate with no particular object. And the first thing she saw there was that strange little vagrant, Con the Quare One, sitting on the bank outside, as if waiting for somebody.

"Meself I am, sure enough," he said, in reply to her exclamation. "But is it yourself you are rightly at all, Rosanne Nolan, that go flourishing about, drivin' through the country as if you were wound up, and won't so much as stop to spake a word to your own people, and they screechin' after you like a troop of mad saygulls?"

"What for would I be stoppin' another person's

car every hand's turn, for nothin' only nonsense as like as not?" Rosanne said defiantly, fearing as she spoke that Miss Hegarty might come round the corner.

"Oh, aye to be sure, if it's there you're livin' cocked up," Con said, nodding sarcastically at the bow-windowed villa, "you'd scarce be apt to notice the likes of that little ould shanty goin' by. But littler houses than it there are, let me tell you, a dale littler, and movin' into a one of them everybody's bound to be some fine day." He intended merely a reproof of pride in general; but Rosanne's uneasy conscience filled her with alarms, and she stared at him panic-stricken.

"Och, for pity's sake, then, what talk have you of them terrible little houses?" she said.

"Sorrow the talk have I of little houses any more than big, or as much, for that matter," he said. "Sure yourself might hear tell of a great big one—that yonder's no size to it—and it so grand and white inside, you'd think 'twas out of this world you were steppin' entirely if you set foot widin it; and a poor body that's took bad, like your mother, is lucky enough to be doin' that same." Con meant to speak reassuringly, as he saw that Rosanne looked unaccountably scared, but her expression grew so terrified that he hastily continued—

"In the name of all that's sacred, alanna, why would you be lookin' at me as if I was about doin'

murder on you? All I come to tell you is nothin' better and nothin' worse than that your poor mother got an ugly fall one day last week crossin' over the steppin'-stones wid the turf-creel, and broke her unfortunate ankle-bone and a couple of her ribs. Ne'er a chance there was for her, Dr. Kavanagh said, unless in the Royal Infirmary at Kilcarden; and there she's lyin' this minyit of time. Doin' finely, she is, they said, if she didn't be frettin' herself bad after you, and not knowin' where you are. 'Twas that that Cassie Duff was tryin' to stop you for the other day, only past you went like a thing wound up, as I said, to come to a standstill nowhere, barrin' at stations. So when Cassie was bemoanin' herself to me last night, because she couldn't tell where you'd took off to, says I to her I'd make it me business to thrack that car first thing this mornin'; and here I be. And if you've e'er a message, I've naught to do but just throt over wid it."

"Sure, then, Con dear," said Rosanne, "if you'll wait an instant till I fetch out me basket, I'll come along wid you, for ne'er a message I'd be sendin' her only meself."

Thus it came to pass that when Miss Hegarty returned from her afternoon's gossip, she received startling news, communicated not without satisfaction by Biddy Collins, the maid, who had always despised her mistress's guest.

"'Deed, ma'am, a while ago she trapesed off with

a little ould cracked beggarman that was sittin' on the roadside. Ne'er a word she said to me ; but if she was comin' back, I dunno why she took her ould basket wid her. Belike *she* knows what all's inside it now—better than you or I, ma'am. Little enough there was in it, anyhow, and she comin' to the house. You'd a right to be lookin' over your things, ma'am."

Whereupon Miss Hegarty bade her "whist talk-ing foolery," but said to herself that it would be a long while before she meddled with other people's visitors, if they were ever so much disappointed.

Meanwhile, Rosanne was tramping along at the top of her speed, and almost beyond Con's, towards the Kilcarden Infirmary, which she reached, with the help of a lift in a dairy-cart, before the sun set, and just when the cheerful, white-capped nurse in Mrs. Nolan's ward had been unsuccessfully trying to console her feverish patient with an extra cup of tea, and unlimited hopes that the morrow would bring news of the absent daughter. This arrival, so opportunely timed, had the best results, and Mrs. Nolan's recovery was thenceforward rapid and steady.

Still, some weeks passed ere the mother could leave the hospital, and Rosanne, during her frequent visits, became deeply impressed with what she saw there. The resourceful skill of kindly Nurse Doyle in particular struck her as a possession much to be admired and coveted. Great was her pride

at being occasionally allowed to help a little, and along with it sprang up a resolve, which she fulfilled several years later, when the tiny cabin in the lane stood empty amid a lonely world. For Rosanne then had herself trained into a very efficient Nurse Nolan, to whom a long bed-row of "cases" looked wistfully for comfort, and seldom looked in vain.

Rosanne's wish accordingly, and Con's prediction, were accomplished in a way—albeit in one that neither of them had thought of on the summer morning when she waited for the Connollys' car.

A TEST OF TRUTH

A TEST OF TRUTH

JIM HANLON, the cobbler, was said by his neighbours to have had his own share of trouble, and they often added, "And himself a very dacint man, goodness may pity him!" His misfortunes began when poor Mary Anne, his wife, died, leaving him forlorn with one rather sickly little girl, and they seemed to culminate when one frosty morning a few years later he broke his leg by a fall on his way to visit Minnie in hospital. The neighbours, who were so much impressed by her father's good qualities and bad luck, did not hold an equally favourable opinion about this Minnie, inclining to consider her a "cross-tempered, spoilt little shrimp of a thing." But Jim himself thought that the width of the world contained nothing like her, which was more or less true. So when she fell ill of a low fever, and the doctor said that the skilled nursing in a Dublin hospital would be by far her best chance, it was only after a sore struggle that Jim could make up his mind to let her go. And then his visit to her at the first moment possible had brought about the

unwary walking and slip on a slide, which resulted so disastrously.

It was indeed a most deplorable accident. If it had happened somewhere near Minnie's hospital, he said to himself, it might have been less unlucky, but, alas, the whole city spread between them and the institution whither he was brought. The sense of his helplessness almost drove him frantic, as he lay in the long ward fretting over the thought that he was tied by the leg, unable to come next or nigh her, whatever might befall, or even to get a word of news about her. But on this latter point his forebodings were not fulfilled. His neighbours proved themselves to be friends in need. At the tidings of his mishap they made their way in to see him from unhandy little Ballyhoy, undeterred by what was often to them no very trivial expense and inconvenience. Nor were they slow to discover that they could do him no greater service than find out for him "what way herself was at all over at the other place." Everybody helped him readily in this matter, more especially three or four good-natured Ballyhoy matrons. On days when they came into town to do their bits of marketing they would augment their toils by long trudges on foot, or costly drives on tramcars, that they might convey to Jim Hanlon the report for which he pined. They considered neither their heavy baskets, nor the circumstance that they were folk to whom time was time, and a penny a penny indeed.

Yet, sad to say, great as was Jim's relief and his gratitude, their very zeal did in some degree diminish the value of their kindness. For their evident desire to please and pacify him awakened in his mind doubts about the means which they might adopt; and it must be admitted that his mistrust was not altogether ungrounded. The tales which they carried to him from "the other place" were not seldom intrinsically improbable, and sounded all the more so to him because of his intimate acquaintance with their subject. When Mrs. Jack Doyle averred that Minnie was devouring all before her, and that the nurse said a strong man would scarce eat as much as she did, Jim remembered Minnie's tomtit-like meals at home, and found the statement hard to accept. It was still worse when they gave him effusively affectionate messages, purporting to come from Minnie, who had always been anything in the world but demonstrative and sentimental. His heart sank as Mrs. Doran assured him that Minnie had sent her love to her own darling treasure of a precious old daddy, for he knew full well that no such greeting had ever emanated from Minnie, and how could he tell, Jim reflected, but that they might be as apt to deceive him about one thing as another? Perhaps there was little or no truth in what they told him about the child being so much better, and able to sit up, and so forth. Like enough one couldn't believe a word they said. On this terribly baffling

question he pondered continually with a troubled mind.

Saturday mornings were always the most likely to bring him visitors, and on a certain Saturday he rejoiced to hear that somebody was asking for him. He was all the more pleased because the lateness of the hour had made him despair of seeing any friends, and because this portly, good-humoured, Mrs. Connolly was just the person he had been wishing to come. She explained that she would have paid him a visit sooner, had not all her children been laid up with colds, and then, as he had hoped, she went on to say that she was going over to see after little Minnie. "And the Sister here's promised me," said Mrs. Connolly, "she'll let me in to bring you word on me way back, even if I'm a trifle beyond the right visitin' time itself."

Thereupon Jim produced a sixpence from under his pillow, where he had kept it ready all the long morning. "If it wouldn't be throublin' you too much, ma'am," he said, "I was wonderin' is there e'er a place you would be passin' by where you could get some sort of a little doll wid this for Minnie."

"Is it a doll?" said Mrs. Connolly. "Why to be sure I will, and welcome. I know a shop in O'Connell Street where they've grand sixpenny dolls, dressed real delightful. I'll get her a one of them as aisy as anythin'." Mrs. Connolly knew that the price of the dolls she had in her eye was actually

sixpence-halfpenny, but she at once resolved to pay the halfpenny herself and not let on.

"And you might maybe be gettin' her an orange wid this," Jim said, handing her a penny.

"Well now it's the lucky child poor Minnie is," Mrs. Connolly declared, "to have such a good daddy. Finely set up she'll be wid a doll and an orange. I'll bring her the best in Dublin, Jim, no fear."

"She might fancy the orange, anyway," Jim said half to himself, with a queer, remorseful sort of look.

Mrs. Connolly having gone, he began to expect her back again with an unreasonable promptitude which lengthened the afternoon prodigiously. He had suffered innumerable apprehensions, and fidgeted himself into a fever of anxiety before she could possibly have returned. At last, however, when her broad, cheerful countenance did reappear to him, looming through the misty March dusk, he felt that he would almost have chosen a further delay. For he had staked so much upon this venture that the crisis of learning whether it had failed or succeeded could not but be rather terrible.

There was nothing apparently alarming in Mrs. Connolly's report. She had found Minnie doing finely. Her nurse said she would be out of bed next week, and was very apt to get her health better than before she took bad. The orange had pleased her highly, and she had bid Mrs. Connolly

tell her daddy that he might be sending her another one next Saturday if he liked. All this was good as far as it went, but about the doll Mrs. Connolly kept silence, and it struck Jim that she shrank away from anything which seemed leading towards a reference to the subject. Jim, who at first had half dreaded and half longed every moment to hear her speak of it, began to think that she might go away without mentioning it, which would not do at all. In the end he had to introduce it himself.

“And how about the bit of a doll, ma’am?” he inquired as unconcernedly as he could. “Was you able to get her e'er a one?”

Unmistakably Mrs. Connolly was much disconcerted by the question. Her face fell, and she hesitated for a while before she replied, with evident reluctance—

“Sure now, man alive, you never can tell what quare notions childe’ll take up wid when they’re sick, and more especially when they do be about gettin’ well agin, the way Minnie is now. Quiet enough the crathurs do be as long as they’re rale bad. But, tellin’ you the truth, Jim, not a bit of her would look at the doll. Some fantigue she had agin it, whatever ailed her, an’ it a great beauty, wid a pink sash on it and all manner. Slingin’ it into the middle of the floor she was, only the nurse caught a hould of it, an’ biddin’ me to take it away out of that. So says I to her, ‘What at all should I do wid the lovely doll, after your poor daddy

sendin' it to yourself?' And says she to me, 'Give the ugly big lump of a thing to the ould divil,' says she, 'an' let him give it to the little young black-leggy divils to play wid if they like.' I declare to you, Jim, thim was the very words of her, sittin' up in her bed, not lookin' the size of anythin'. 'Deed, now, she's the comical child. But sure who'd be mindin' her? And the nurse says she'll keep the doll till to-morrow, an' if Minnie doesn't fancy it then, she'll give it to the little girl in the next cot that does be frettin' after her mother, so it won't go to loss. An' besides——"

She stopped short in surprise, for Jim, who had been laughing silently to himself, now broke out in tones of positive rapture—

“‘The little young black-leggy divils’—that’s Minnie herself and no mistake this time, glory be to God! Sorra the fatigued it was, but just the nathur of her, for the thoughts of a doll she never could abide all the days of her life. She’d as lief be playin’ wid a snake or a toad. So if you’d let on to me that she liked it, ma’am, well I’d know ‘twas only romancin’ to me you were. But the truth youould me, right enough, and thank you kindly. The little villin’ll be runnin’ about before I am, plaze goodness. Och bedad, I can see her slingin’ it neck an’ crop out of the bed.”

As Jim fell to laughing again Mrs. Connolly looked at him puzzled, and with some disapproval,

though she would not express the latter sentiment to him in his invalided condition. But she soon afterwards took leave, and on her homeward way she said to herself, "Musha, good gracious, mightn't one suppose Jim Hanlon 'ud have more sinse than to go sind the poor imp of a child a prisint only for the sake of annoyin' her? 'Twas the quare, foolish way to be spendin' a sixpence, in my opinion. But sure 'twas be way of a joke, an' the poor man hasn't much chance of e'er a one lyin' there. It's wonderful the store men set by non-sense. Sometimes you'd think they were all born fools, they do be that aisy amused. You'll hear thim guffawin' like a jackass bewitched over silly ould blathers that an infant child 'ud have more wit than to be mindin'."

Certainly Jim was so well satisfied with his joke, if joke it were, that when he grew drowsy towards evening his last thoughts made him chuckle contentedly. "The little black-leggy divils," he said to himself. "Glory be to God! she's finely." And he fell asleep with a glad and grateful heart.

HUTCHINSON'S 6d. NOVELS

A Singer from the Sea	Amelia E. Barr
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Mollie's Prince	"
My Lady Frivol	"
The Summit House Mystery	L. Dougall
Was it a Sin?	Anna Comtesse de Brémont
The Grand Duke	Carlton Dawe
A Bride of Japan	Darley Dale
The Village Blacksmith	Dick Donovan
From Clue to Capture	Evelyn Everett-Green
Found and Fettered	Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler
The Secret of Wold Hall	B. L. Farjeon
Place and Power	"
The Farringdons	"
Aaron the Jew	"
Samuel Boyd of Catchpole Square	Mrs. Hugh Fraser
Shadows in the Snow	Tom Gallon
The Last Tenant	"
The Splendid Porsenna	"
The Dead Ingleby	"
Meg the Lady	"
Peploe's Paperchase	"
The Girl Behind the Keys	"
Sylvia's Lovers	Mrs. Gaskell
Love Decides	Charles Garvice
Babs the Impossible	Sarah Grand
Chiffon's Marriage	"Gyp"
The Lost Continent	Cutcliffe Hyne
The Filibusters	Joseph Hatton
By Order of the Czar	"Iota"
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Patricia; a Mother	S. R. Keightley
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The Cavaliers	"
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The Seven Secrets	"
The Gamblers	"
The Under Secretary	"
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Confessions of a Ladies' Man	"
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By Right of Sword	"
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In the Name of a Woman	"
A Nest of Linnets	F. Frankfort Moore
Phyllis of Philistia	"
The Secret of the Court	"
I Forbid the Banns	"
One Fair Daughter	"
The Jessamy Bride	"
They Call it Love!	"
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Our Lady of Deliverance	John Oxenham
The Successor	Richard Pryce
Franks, Duellist	Ambrose Pratt
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Hearts of Wales	"
A Welsh Singer	"
Torn Sails	"
A Welsh Witch	"
Garthowen	"
By Berwon Banks	"
On the Wings of the Wind	"
A Vagabond Lover	" Rita "
The Sinner	"
Good Mrs. Hypocrite	"
The Lie Circumspect	"
Peg the Rake	"
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An Old Rogue's Tragedy	"
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The Ruling Passion	"
The Way of a Man	Morley Roberts
Roger Vanbrugh's Wife	Adeline Sergeant
The Sixth Sense	"
The Minister of State	J. A. Steuart
The Eternal Quest	"
The Terrible Czar	Count Tolstoi
The Wife's Trials	Emma Jane Worboise
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